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# SCREEN

INCORPORATING SCREEN EDUCATION



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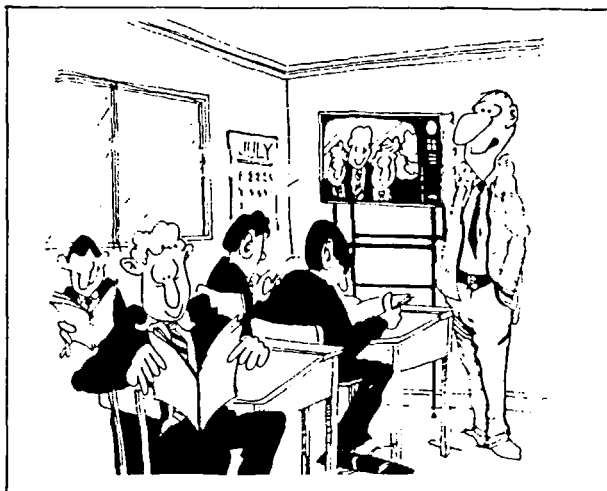
## PEDAGOGY

CRITICAL ACCOUNTS  
OF  
MEDIA EDUCATION



# WHY PEDAGOGY?

## AN INTRODUCTION TO THIS ISSUE BY DAVID LUSTED




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<sup>1</sup> 'Education in Crisis', in James Donald and Ann Marie Wolpe (eds), *Is There Anyone Here from Education?*, London, Pluto, 1983, p 6.

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<sup>2</sup> Hard 'g', then soft 'g'.

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*There is no general pedagogy: only pedagogies, like horses, for courses.*

— Stuart Hall<sup>1</sup>

WHY SHOULD PEDAGOGY be of interest to anyone? Few are familiar with the term. Even aficionados gag on its pronunciation<sup>2</sup> and falter in its spelling.

Where the word is familiar at all, it's most often in the shape of 'pedagogue', conjuring mental images of the mortar-board and cane, Bash Street Kids and Mr Chips (Michael Redgrave rather than Peter O'Toole), connoting pedantry and dogmatism.

Indeed, even among elite realms of thought, pedagogy is taken as co-terminous with teaching, merely describing a central activity in an education system. The invisibility of pedagogy in education and cultural production generally is well matched by the imprecision of dictionary definitions which relate pedagogy variously to teaching as an agency, a profession or a practice.

Within education and even among teachers, where the term should have greatest purchase, pedagogy is under-defined, often referring to no more than a teaching style, a matter of personality and temperament, the mechanics of securing classroom control to encourage learning, a cosmetic bandage on the hard body of classroom contact.

So, is there any useful purpose in investigating a term so incoherent and unacknowledged? Why is pedagogy important? It is important since, as a concept, it draws attention to the *process* through which knowledge is produced. Pedagogy addresses the 'how' questions

involved not only in the transmission or reproduction of knowledge but also in its production. Indeed, it enables us to question the validity of separating these activities so easily by asking under what conditions and through what means we 'come to know'. How one teaches is therefore of central interest but, through the prism of pedagogy, it becomes inseparable from what is being taught and, crucially, how one learns. In this perspective, to bring the issue of pedagogy in from the cold and onto the central stage of cultural production is to open up for questioning areas of enquiry generally repressed by conventional assumptions, as prevalent in critical as in dominant practices, about theory production and teaching, and about the nature of knowledge and learning.

Pedagogy is desperately under-theorised. No loss, at one level; it's an ugly word in print and on the tongue. The problem is that what the concept addresses is crucial and the absence of its development has had material effects. One effect is a share in the failure to realise post-war aspirations towards a genuinely democratic and popular mandatory education system. Another effect is yet another failure; this time to connect radical cultural theory to popular movements whose interests that theory declares it represents. Big claims. What this issue of *Screen* seeks is to establish some terms for the claims and to investigate a number of related areas in which the concept of pedagogy can be deployed as part of a programme to change the sequence of failure.

What this article attempts is to set the stage for new thinking in film, TV, media and cultural studies and education. Following Stuart Hall, its task is to establish the issue of 'pedagogy in general', situating the articles that follow which deal with 'pedagogies in particular'. The central question here is how adequate the theorisation of film, TV, culture in general can be without a consciousness of the conditions which produce, negotiate, transform, realise and return it *in practice*. What pedagogy addresses is the process of production and exchange in this cycle, the transformation of consciousness that takes place in the interaction of three agencies – the teacher, the learner and the knowledge they together produce. If this is to describe a model of relations set by the terms of the social relations of the classroom, it holds good too – at least in principle (and I'll even grudgingly concede metaphorically) – in the realm of theory production with the teacher rendered as theorist/critic, the learner as reader/activist and knowledge as theory.

The concept of pedagogy gives substance to the nature of the relations in these models. It refuses any tendency to instrumentalise the relations, to disconnect their interactivity or to give value to one agency over another. Hence, for instance, it denies notions of the teacher as functionary (neutral transmitter of knowledge as well as 'state functionary')<sup>3</sup>, the learner as 'empty vessel' or passive respondent, knowledge as immutable material to impart. Instead, it foregrounds exchange between and over the categories, it recognises the productivity of the relations, and it renders the parties within them as active, changing and changeable agencies.

To be sensitive to the pedagogy of teaching and of theory (just to mix

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<sup>3</sup> As constructed by the new sociology of education. See Michael Young (ed), *Knowledge and Control*, London, Collier and Macmillan, 1972.

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the relations a bit) is to undermine the conventional transmission model wherein knowledge is produced, conveyed and received. Calling this act 'mediation' changes not one whit the one-way direction of the process. The transmission model is unilinear; anyone trying to turn-back in the one-way traffic is unceremoniously run over. To insist on the pedagogy of theory, as with the pedagogy of teaching, is to recognise a more transactional model whereby knowledge is produced not just at the researcher's desk nor at the lectern but in the *consciousness*, through the process of thought, discussion, writing, debate, exchange; in the social and internal, collective and isolated struggle for control of understanding; from engagement in the unfamiliar idea, the difficult formulation pressed at the limit of comprehension or energy; in the meeting of the deeply held with the casually dismissed; in the dramatic moment of realisation that a scarcely regarded concern, an unarticulated desire, the barely assimilated, can come alive, make for a new sense of self, change commitments and activity. And these are also *transformations* which take place across all agencies in an educational process, regardless of their title as academic, critic, teacher or learner.

What this somewhat flowery passion turns on is a distress at the customary division of value accorded to the academic and the teacher, on the one hand, and the teacher and the learner on the other. Indeed, one cause of the fundamental refusal to take the need for pedagogy seriously is located in just these divisions. Theorists theorise, produce; teachers teach, reproduce. Therefore, such a logic would run, if anyone need be concerned about their pedagogy it is only the teacher—with a heavy stress on *only*.

The low cultural status accorded to teaching is not just a matter of contemporary government policies feeding popular prejudices. It is a view shared by many in universities who give such low priority to their teaching duties, a view in tune with the lowest educational status accorded to those earlier sectors of the education system where teaching is seen as a merely instrumental function. Sadly, the self-image of many teachers also accords with this view, inhibiting those feelings of value and confidence which are essential prerequisites to any change in understanding the relation between academic and teacher. Rather, what needs to be asserted is that teaching is as much knowledge production as the more obvious activities of researching, writing, publishing, lecturing.

But this is only part of the story. Knowledge is not produced in the intentions of those who believe they hold it, whether in the pen or in the voice. It is produced in the process of interaction, between writer and reader at the moment of reading, and between teacher and learner at the moment of classroom engagement. Knowledge is not the matter that is offered so much as the matter that is understood. To think of fields or bodies of knowledge as if they are the property of academics and teachers is wrong. It denies an equality in the relations at moments of interaction and falsely privileges one side of the exchange, and what that side 'knows', over the other.

Moreover, for critical cultural producers to hold to this view of know-

ledge carries its own pedagogy, an autocratic and elite pedagogy. It's not just that it denies the value of what learners know, which it does, but that it misrecognises the conditions necessary for the kind of learning—critical, engaged, personal, social—called for by the knowledge itself. There is a fundamental problem for much of the cultural and educational criticism that exists, which has been felt most acutely in recent years—a body of criticism which has exposed the ideological nature of dominant institutions and texts and called for alternative and oppositional activities. What that history is, how its movements regularly fail in their emancipatory objectives and the extent to which that failure resides at least in some part in the form, the pedagogy, of its address is a key issue for contemporary and future practices.

But first things first. If knowledge needs to be conceived as produced in exchange, so too must all agents in its active production be conceived as producers, the divisions between theorising, writing, teaching and learning be dissolved. The problem with a great deal of cultural and educational theory alike, shared even by critical/radical theory which should know better, is that it makes ritual nods in the direction of acknowledging a pedagogy of sorts in its production while, in its form, disavowing its importance entirely. This reflex practice has a politics and that politics is deeply reactionary. It is based on two unquestioned assumptions.

The first is that to transmit ideas (whether impersonally, through writing, or personally, through interaction) is enough: the theorist leaves the dissemination of theory to the skills of the intermediary; the teacher leaves to chance or to the realm of the unfathomable the learner's production of knowledge. The second assumption is that the pedagogy of any address *follows* its production rather than being integral to it, as if there is no pedagogy in the fact of theorising or teaching itself. The first assumption is irresponsible, the second is self-deluding.

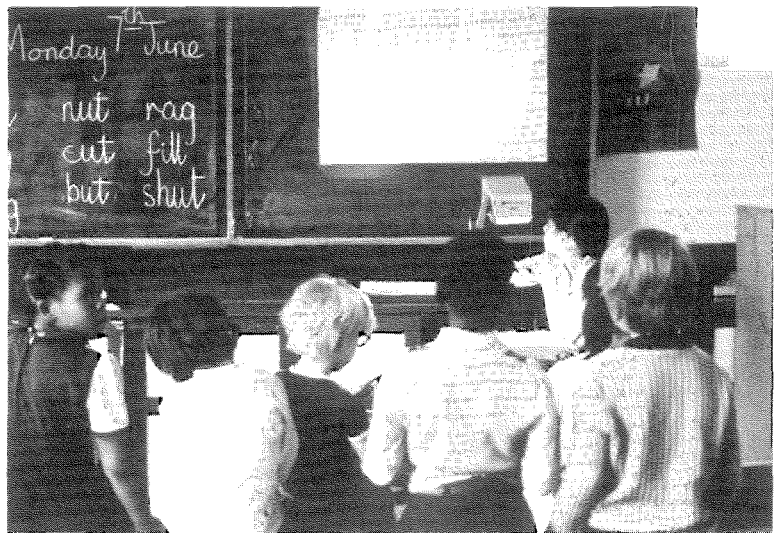
What this state of affairs leads to is a system of critical knowledge-production that bellows into a void for changes in understanding without properly attending to the conditions necessary to maximising the opportunities to effect those changes. Those 'necessary conditions' include a mode of address which is sensitive to the actual social positioning of its respondents and an acknowledgement of different forms of knowledge-production which take account of the different contexts in which they perform.

The relation between critic and reader, teacher and learner is inevitably a power relation. To draw attention to the nature of knowledge-production in those relations and to demand consideration of the pedagogy of those relations is not to obscure their inequality. Rather, it is in order more adequately to take account of it and the factors which determine it. It is a commonplace that the relations are often based on differences in age, more obviously so in the mandatory education sector, and also in class position, educational biography, familiarity and facility with disciplines and ideas. The relations are also often characterised by distinctions in cultural expectations, social experience, linguistic struct-

ures and even qualities like confidence, commitment and energy which are more often symptoms of the social differences.

If it is necessary to take account of these differences, it is no mean feat to think through a pedagogy that can overcome or even minimise their role in inhibiting the interactive production of knowledge, a pedagogy that promises transformative knowledge. It is clearly not to argue for a writer in *Screen*, say, to offer a mode of writing that engages the attention of every primary school pupil in the land. There are clearly different orders of writing and teaching which inevitably exclude certain groups. But it is to argue, to stay with the example, for a mode of writing that in its address acknowledges the conditions of reading and the institutional positions of as wide a readership as is potentially possible, within the overwhelming and unaccountable constraining variables.

Similarly, in the classroom of, especially, mandatory education, many forms of organisation have been developed over the years to take account of the myriad differences of biography, disposition towards learning, social position, etc met by the teacher (forms like streaming, 'mixed ability' setting, group work, project work, etc). Throughout all of these lies the unresolved tension between 'getting through the syllabus' and responding to the discerned or expressed needs/'pace' of individual learners and between respecting what learners' know or offer and devising non-threatening strategies that enable learners to subject knowledge to critical scrutiny. And if these tensions do not provide difficulties enough, there is still the position of those who, through various combinations of class/gender/race/age/biography are less prepared to subject their identity to degrees of exposure attendant upon the task of serious learning. Groups whose identity is less secure and/or operate in the conditions of relative powerlessness or oppression are, reasonably, not too well disposed to the process of self-scrutiny, especially when 'guided' by quite 'others' called teachers.



Explaining image projection in an inner-city classroom. (Photo by Richard Eke)

None of this offers easy answers but it does widen the scope of notions of 'necessary conditions' over which 'pedagogy' can address change. 'Knowledge' is the product not just of agencies, through certain practices, but also differentiated, according to the conditions in which it is (to be) produced. And these practices must therefore bear a distinctive pedagogy.

The failure of so many critical attempts to democratise the structure, teaching and the curriculum of state education lies, in part, in the inability to connect a radical critique to a popular movement. Similarly, so much of recent cultural criticism has failed to work for the penetration of its arguments into the mainstream of cultural and political life. It would be a nonsense, of course, to minimise the difficulties of popularising critical analysis, of securing platforms to argue cases through the major media channels in order to command the field required even to engage the appropriate audiences. But part of the task of securing the conditions for disseminating argument is to attend to the nature and address of the argument itself—in other words, its pedagogy.

So much cultural production assumes the self-evident nature of its 'correctness', refusing to acknowledge that the testing of its argument outside the realms of its own institutional spaces is part of the process of extending and validating that 'correctness'. Where attempts to popularise aspects of cultural criticism have been made, they are often conceived as risks—not least risking puritan condemnation from within the extended ranks of 'natural' allies. But the hard fact is that critical movements for change fail if they cannot command attention from groups wider than their own.<sup>4</sup> Much of the history of conservative success in the educational sphere—from the *Black Papers*<sup>5</sup> of the early '70s to the empty pre-vocationalist rhetoric of today—and in the political sphere—the rise of Thatcherism and Reaganism against all Left expectation and predictions—can be attributed to the Right's precise recognition of the need to popularise its appeal through connecting the experience of the widest social groups possible to its arguments<sup>6</sup>.

A great deal of Left analysis of the rise of the Right scorns this aspect of its programme, with accusations of an empty 'presentation', the Saatchi and Saatchi syndrome. But the manipulative, if not downright false, rhetoric of the Right is no cause to jettison the importance it has discerned in attending to how to 'speak', to adjusting a mode of address to the conditions of differently positioned social groups. Indeed, it could be argued that the Right has maintained its power precisely because it has understood the need to construct, adapt and translate its rhetoric for different groups at changing moments. The Right therefore works not only with a clear sense of its pedagogy but also attends to the task of constructing distinctive pedagogies. What the Left needs is to develop one, and some, of its own. And if pedagogies are needed in political and cultural production generally, so too are they essential in education if critical curriculum interventions are to command attention from educationists, parents and, not least where it matters, students/pupils.

The history of successive waves of curriculum intervention in Film

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<sup>4</sup> A timely critique of radical organisations and the extent of their self-imposed failures can be found in Charles Landry et al, *What a Way to Run a Railroad*, London, Comedia, 1985.

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<sup>5</sup> See Cox and Dyson (eds), *Fight for Education*, Black Paper One, 1969 and *The Crisis in Education*, Black Paper Two, 1970, London, Critical Quarterly Society.

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<sup>6</sup> This theme has been developed in Stuart Hall's writing over the '80s. See, for example, 'The Culture Gap', *Marxism Today*, January 1984, pp 18-22.

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Studies, TV Studies and then Media Studies offers a key case in point. Shifts from one arena of study to the next have occurred in order better to take account of the changing cultural scene. But, throughout, there has been an implicit assertion that a revised subject constitutes in itself a radical intervention in education, somehow shifting the social relations of the classroom in more democratic directions, providing a site for dramatic changes of consciousness in and by itself. The emptiness of any such claim is surely now clear as these study areas begin to take firmer purchase on the curriculum and it acts as a caution to making similar claims to the more expansive possibilities carried by the promotion of a new stage of 'media education'.

Simply teaching about cinema or television (or, for that matter, marxism or psychoanalysis) is no guarantee of a progressive educational and cultural intervention. There is a pattern of excellent, competent and indifferent teaching every bit as evident as in the teaching of quite conventional disciplines. What is required is greater attention, not just to the development of criticism in the field, but to the pedagogies that need to be inscribed within the production of knowledge (remember, now rendered as theory/criticism/teaching/learning) in order to actually effect its radical/critical intentions.

So far, I have been writing as if pedagogy has never been addressed by cultural production, but this is not the case. There is a history.

A dispute over the pedagogy of media studies began in the pages of *Screen Education* when Manuel Alvarado<sup>7</sup> critiqued the pedagogy implied in Len Masterman's widely influential book, *Teaching about Television*<sup>8</sup>. Alvarado discerned a residual progressivism in Masterman's examples of classroom practice, a mixed economy of activities too reliant on pupil's expressed or presumed preferences. For him, this was a pedagogy of exclusion, denying learners the opportunity to engage in 'really useful knowledge' about the media which determined those preferences in the first place. This characterisation was subsequently denied by Masterman who turned on the pedagogy he inferred from Alvarado: it amounted, he said, to an old transmission model in new clothes, the teacher defining what was to count as 'useful knowledge' and imposing a new academicism and a new autocracy over a potentially democratic mode of learning.

This was an important moment of debate, making explicit a generation of assumptions about the radical nature of media studies in education. But it was inconclusive. The dispute turned on different disciplinary emphases—for Masterman, textual analyses based on newly-developing literary approaches; for Alvarado, institutional analyses based on media sociology—whose pedagogies were assumed rather than argued. It is not clear, for instance, that the study of a television game-show bears any particular pedagogy more or less progressive or effective than a pedagogy borne by the study of the broadcasting structures in which the game show is produced. Although the critics were certainly disputing the *content* of knowledge, it became less clear how to understand the connections between that dispute and the claims they were

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<sup>7</sup> Manuel Alvarado, 'Television Studies and Pedagogy', *Screen Education* 38, Spring 1981, pp 56-67.

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<sup>8</sup> Len Masterman, *Teaching about Television*, London, Macmillan, 1980.

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making for different pedagogies.

It was Judith Williamson, however, who demonstrated some of the elisions in the debate so far, when she asserted<sup>9</sup>, contentiously, that although we all knew *what* the state of knowledge was pressing us to teach, there was, less contentiously, a resounding silence over the *how*. The debate had been inadequate so far, she argued, since it addressed only the teacher's role in the classroom. Her concern was with what was actually going on in the students' heads. Rather than seeing learners as abstractly active or passive, more or less informed, she turned her attention to how students in her own experience could ritually reproduce the knowledge she offered without fundamentally shifting their frames of thought. Boys could learn that romance magazines constructed girls as solely sexual objects, that that process was limiting and offensive, but it did not prevent them reproducing dominant patterns of behaviour towards girls in their own classroom, nor thinking of all girls outside it as complicit victims in that construction. What was, and remains, required was an effective pedagogy that precisely worked on *changing* the consciousness of the students.

Williamson's contribution can be understood as a founding moment of 'modern' media studies. It established the importance of the study of the media as a stage for connecting issues of personal identity with cultural activity and, even more importantly for this article, skilfully demonstrated the crying need for attention to an effective critical pedagogy.

Since then, only Ian Connell has taken the debate over media studies pedagogy a stage further. Connell<sup>10</sup> argued that Williamson appeared to be developing an effective general pedagogy that confronted students with knowledge of their own inscription in cultural activity. But what lay behind Williamson's pedagogy, he argued, was an assumption of the manipulative role of the media and a construction of students as inevitably positioned by the ideological meanings critics discerned in media texts.

Connell implied that it was the nature of this critical assumption that *produced* the statements from students that so little challenged what they believed, rather than what they said. What Williamson had skilfully discerned was the product of her teaching, but what she had misrecognised was its cause. At stake wasn't some independent pedagogy severed from a particular critical assumption but the necessary, arising pedagogy of that assumption. Connell asserted that what was required was a more agnostic model wherein students could openly explore what they actually discerned from their experience and readings of media texts (and, importantly, those critical positions on media texts and institutions) rather than the closed model within which students focused on the production of themselves by the media.

What Connell more generally discerned, in a moment of great insight, was the intimacy of the connection between the pedagogy of teaching and that of media criticism. Taking the cue from Connell, this connection would assert the implicitly autocratic pedagogy not only of the great swell of conventional teaching but also of the history of theory,

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<sup>9</sup> Judith Williamson, 'How Does Girl Number 20 Understand Ideology?', *Screen Education* 40, Autumn/Winter, 1981/2, pp 80-87.

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<sup>10</sup> Ian Connell, "'Progressive' Pedagogy?", *Screen* May-June 1983, vol 24, no 3, pp 50-54.

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<sup>11</sup> Often attributed to Gramsci but actually a variation of Romain Rolland's phrase, 'Pessimism of the intelligence, optimism of the will', adapted 'by Gramsci into something of a programmatic slogan' – Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1971, footnote, p 174.

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both mainstream and critical. In Leavis' apparent appeal to consensus, 'This is so, is it not'<sup>11</sup>, resides a blueprint for this state of affairs, a positioning of reader/learner inescapably within the terms of the theory/teaching. Like the mode of address of much critical theory, the maxim demands assent, suggesting that to be not so positioned is to be deviant – ignorant or foolish. The pedagogy, in other words, neither brooks dissent nor appeals to the possibility of debate within it. Critical theory often carries a contradiction in its address calling for change in its content whilst reproducing the existing relations in its form. It appeals to the experience and understanding of its reader as supportive evidence of its argument, while at the same time denying the possibility of experience being a factor in its understanding. It is a pedagogy of closure and a politics, not of debate, but of direction.

No surprise, then, that in a teaching pedagogy conforming to the shape of the theory of which it is a product, the learner can only accept/reject the terms offered. Nor any surprise that teachers experience as much resistance to this form of critical education as others experience with forms of conventional education. In this scenario, my support is entirely with those who resist – they're learning a lot. Also, crucially, within the terms of acceptance lies a distancing between the learner as individual subject and as social subject.

Judith Williamson's student plainly cannot take on the identity of another gender, but that does not explain the lack of fit between his learning and the absence of change in consciousness. His learning, regardless of the quality of the argument, operates in a realm of closure, unconnected to transformations in his *own* experience, responses, argument and sense of self. The male student cannot learn, despite 'knowing' the feminist argument not because, crassly, he is (only) a male, nor because his maleness disenables him from transforming his knowledge into his social practice. The male student cannot 'know' because his learning is not socialised, operating only at a global level of structures and systems, disconnected from the social realm to which he knowingly relates. To draw back from the example, it could be said that for such relations to be worked towards requires a constellation of pedagogies addressed to the complexity of experience constituting any learner's and learner group's gendered, raced, classed, aged and discrete biographical social and historical identity.

What is required, therefore, is attention to open-ended and specific pedagogies, sensitive to context and difference, addressed to the social position of any learning group and the positions of the individuals within it.

The implication is that the search for a general pedagogy is fruitless, a grasping at shadows. Pedagogy in general is always inevitably tied to a historical moment defined within the then current state of knowledge. It is consequently necessary to go on to clarify the nature of *particular* pedagogies in particular instances of theory and teaching. What is required is productive distinctions between pedagogies of theory and teaching at particular moments, pedagogies that release genuine engage-

ment and transformative understanding in the consciousness.

What follows is a provisional sketch of some recent cultural and educational history, attempting to characterise and evaluate such moments of shift in critical cultural and educational pedagogies, and looking towards the future.

It's an arbitrary moment to start, perhaps, but the publication of *The Popular Arts*<sup>12</sup> marked one founding landmark in the 1960s. Whannel and Hall's project was to establish the importance of studying aspects of popular culture on the same terms as earlier generations of 'high art' – subjecting the 'best' of each medium and form to a developed 'literary' scrutiny. The teaching pedagogy here was implied, only and indistinguishable from that surrounding it elsewhere in education – the transference of the grammar school mode into the new arena of secondary modern education. Although the book itself was not widely read, the arguments were influential – it fitted its moment right.

But the seeds of the developing educational movement of 'relevance' are discernable even there. The 'relevance' principle determined that the cultural framework inhabited by (working class) children was to be celebrated in their education in a manner parallel to the concern elsewhere with the patterns of their social relations and work expectations. (Not all teachers shared this view of popular culture, incidentally, but used it as the wooden horse to promote other areas like language skills or moral education. Perhaps the 'relevance' movement caught on precisely *because* it was able to act as an umbrella for so many educational interest groups.) Thus it was that education became part of a general cultural shift in which popular culture was conceived as 'of the people' and not only 'for' them.

Subsequently, in the early 1970s, the pedagogy of both cultural position and teaching was contested. In cultural criticism, media institutions rather than media texts became the focus and these were argued, in Enzensberger's renowned phrase, to be 'consciousness industries'<sup>13</sup>, calling up media consumers to positions within dominant patterns of thought. This new movement was shared in radical arenas of education, with a rejection of 'relevance' and a turn, instead, to a construction of the learner as functionary of cognitive domination. For radical teachers, this development required their learners' release from affiliation to their experience in favour of an investigation of the institutions, discerned as key agencies in constructing their experience. (Thus the contest between Masterman and Alvarado.)

The late 1970s witnessed a further shift. A plethora of new disciplinary ideas from literary theory, semiotics, marxist aesthetics and then psychoanalysis produced perhaps the most significant post-war cultural moment. Film theory developed apace, refining textual analysis, refocusing on traditions of film practices counter to the dominant Hollywood narrative models and, through feminist appropriations, putting the cultural construction of identity on the agenda. Throughout this period, the call for the development of critical readers was virtually exclusive. Its educational product, through the ferment of debate,

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<sup>12</sup> Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel, *The Popular Arts*, London, Hutchinson, 1964.

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<sup>13</sup> Hans Magnus Enzensberger, 'Constituents of a Theory of the Media (1970)', in *Raids and Reconstructions*, London, Pluto, 1976.

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<sup>14</sup> It's worth re-reading perhaps the clearest written example of this genre, not least to see how sweetly time has smiled on the matter: Edward Buscombe, Christine Gledhill, Alan Lovell and Christopher Williams, 'Statement: Psychoanalysis and Film', *Screen* Winter 1976/7, vol 16 no 4, pp 119-130.

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<sup>15</sup> Leavis's elusive maxim is celebrated in Robin Wood, *Hitchcock's Films*, London, Zwemmer, 1965, and addressed more circumspectly in an editorial in *Screen* Summer 1975, vol 16 no 2, p 4. Len Masterman in *Teaching the Media*, London, Comedia, 1985, p 60, may have located the debate that produced the phrase. See F R Leavis, 'Literary Criticism and Philosophy: A Reply (to Rene Wellek)', *Scrutiny* VI, June 1 1937, pp 60-61.

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provoked significant developments, but it also proved divisive in ways still yet to be fully worked out. One crucial division was political, driving wedges between a hard-line vanguard politics and those more wary of its anti-democratic tendencies. Significant for the concern of pedagogy was the division produced between certain academics and certain teachers<sup>14</sup>, the former eager to establish a radical film theory to shift cultural debate and affect the academic curriculum, the latter only too aware of the mismatch between that drive and the conditions of the classroom. Reconciliations of sorts, perhaps more in teaching practices than in print, have since developed but the legacy of that period is still acute. It was in the Babel-like conditions of the moment that Judith Williamson's appropriation of the notions of the psychoanalytic subject for the purposes of debate over pedagogy offered a clarity of focus.

But as some of the certainties of cultural debate in the latter '70s gave way to the 'crisis (or, perhaps better, 'absence') of theory' as the '80s developed, propelled not least by the shock of success of the new radical Right, so the issue of pedagogy was silenced yet again. Ian Connell's contribution is rooted in this moment: a breath of fresh air in its assertion that pedagogy lies in the form of theory but fatalistic in its implication that no pedagogies can be developed to correct the mistakes of the past beyond a kind of 'market economy' model of sympathetic and listening classroom social relations.

The problem *felt* by many, if not *of* all, current cultural producers is precisely one of their (but I mean 'our') agency in this moment of crisis. The oft-quoted phrase, 'Pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will'<sup>15</sup>, is heard on many lips as a kind of comforter in this moment of crisis in cultural theory and uncertainty in the classroom. But there are limitations on living out the logic of cheerfully whistling while the walls of classrooms crumble, books fall apart in students' hands, teachers talk 'interestingly' about last night's episode of *EastEnders* and academe disappears in the black hole of post-modernism until, hopefully, social democracy rides to the rescue at the next general election.

There remains the pressing need for new arenas of investigation through which to review old histories and current practices. More than in order to survive these difficult times, theories and practices that have failed to deliver need careful and pointed new scrutiny through new frames of reference. The promise of the concept of pedagogy lies in its possibilities for thinking anew *how* cultural producers, in their different sites and purposes, but in a newly-discerned collective engagement, can act productively and transformatively.

It is time, in short, for new campaigns to be addressed which call for affiliation and alignment between and across the different agencies who are the subjects here, moving together out of their institutional ghettos to make alliances across the cultural and educational sectors, and connections even beyond them. Importantly, alliances can and must be made not at the expense of effacing differences of particular institutional conditions and interest groups, but, like the dominant power-blocs, in order to aggregate larger forces through the construction of territories

where components of differences meet in collective interest. What is called for is nothing less than the development of a new manifesto for cultural producers. A significant part of the intention of such a manifesto would be to produce a cultural practice that, in its collective and particular operations, works to transform knowledge as argued here, working for genuinely social and popular connections. Conjuring up alignments across differences can be enabled by close attention to the development of a new and collective pedagogy incorporating different pedagogies rooted in their different conditions of knowledge production.

The collection of articles in this issue of *Screen* begin to develop ways of thinking this project. All the articles and reviews here attend to the issue of pedagogy-in-general by addressing matters of specific pedagogies. Gillian Swanson's review of Annette Kuhn's *Power of the Image* contains an analysis of the pedagogy of a leading cultural critic and teacher, connecting her writing (theory-production) to her teaching (knowledge-production) in a detailed close reading. Setting the scene here for connecting the arenas of theory and teaching, Swanson then turns her attention to the independent film and video production sector and its problematic use in formal education. In so doing, she offers exciting grounds on which separate developments can be seen as sharing similar interests in a collective project—difference in unity.

In Valerie Walkerdine's scrutiny of progressivist teaching and its framing legacy on contemporary classroom activity lies a devastating critique of an educational practice without a developed pedagogy. Her account of the impossible burden this legacy places particularly on women teachers in the primary sector poses a new issue to address. Richard Eke continues Walkerdine's critique of the construction of childhood with a comparison of research on play and early TV viewing. Chris Richards explores the volatile area of anti-racist teaching at an important point in the establishment of this recent educational initiative, demonstrating the need to develop its pedagogy in a detailed case-study based on his own teaching experience.

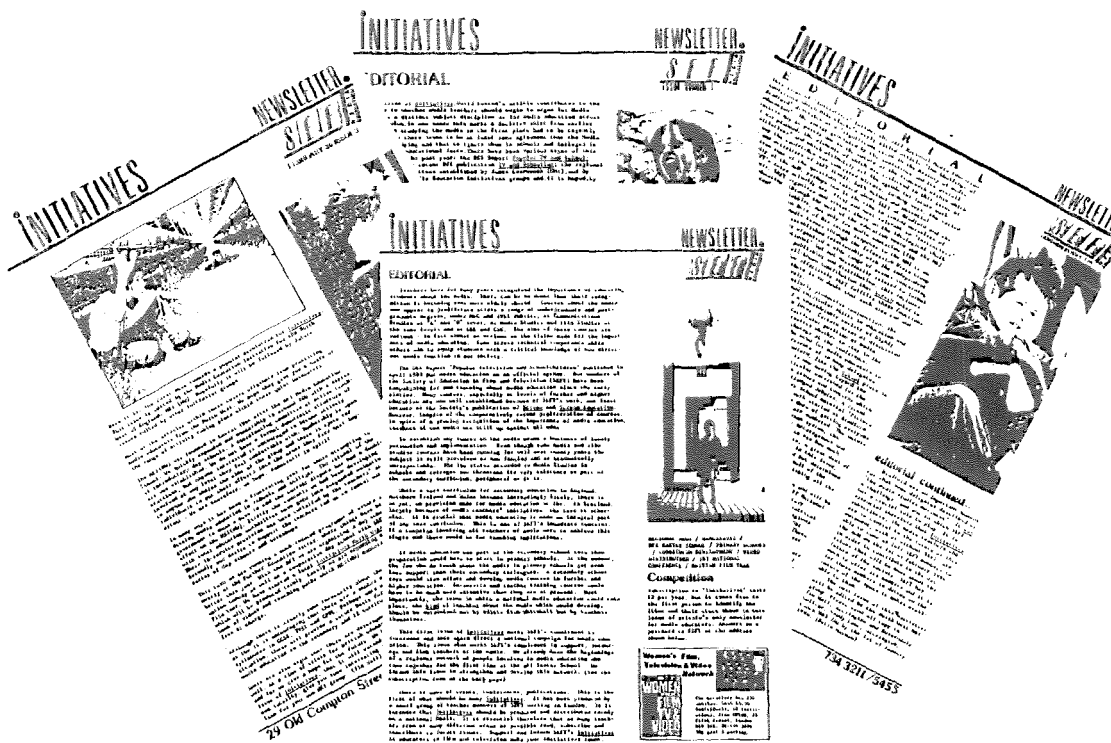
Two writers address the fine art curriculum: Jan Grover on the teaching of photography in US higher education, Simon Watney on the map of the subject drawn in the recently published critical reader, *The New Art History*, and its relation to *Screen's* own intervention in the area. Both articles criticise failures of pedagogy, failures which are as active in nominally 'oppositional' sectors as in dominant cultural practices.

Recent works on teaching the media are also examined in this issue. Cary Bazalgette scrutinises the construction of 'media studies' in the publication *Making Sense of the Media*, finding its pedagogy suspect. In David Buckingham's review of Len Masterman's latest publication, *Teaching the Media*, a similar investigation proffers a different analysis with pedagogy again the central issue. The analysis is spikily contested by Len Masterman in his reply.

If most of these articles derive from the hard experiences of teaching, it should come as no surprise. Teachers, by the nature of their work with often resistant learners, with always 'pre-formed' learners, are forced to

address the issue of pedagogy with every working breath they take, even when unaware of it. Here they collectively offer a case for the centrality of the issue of pedagogy to cultural production. It is hoped that writers from other areas of cultural production will take up the case for working similarly, or at least symptomatically, in future issues of *Screen*. Most of all, it is sorely necessary for *all* our pedagogies to come under new scrutiny, the site for development of a new period of cultural education in the later '80s.

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** My thanks to David Buckingham,, Sean Cubitt and David Lusted for their co-ordination of this issue.



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## Initiatives

Initiatives, the termly newsletter from SEFT for media education, is an essential resource for information, events, books and teaching materials old and new, articles on education policy and regional developments, classroom tips, news, reviews and opinions, on everything from pop to super-8, from photography to independent video, from pre-school to community education, and from legislation to forthcoming programmes. 'Invaluable... Recommended' (Len Masterman). £3 per annum in the UK and Ireland. Available from SEFT.

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# RETHINKING REPRESENTATION

GILLIAN SWANSON REVIEWS  
'THE POWER OF THE IMAGE'

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<sup>1</sup>Annette Kuhn, *The Power of the Image: Essays on Representation and Sexuality*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985. (Page references will be noted in the text.)

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<sup>2</sup>Annette Kuhn, *Women's Pictures*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982, p 4.

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ANNETTE KUHN is one of very few film theorists who acknowledge the political position from which their analysis derives and at the same time attend to their own pedagogy, the process through which they inform. *The Power of the Image*<sup>1</sup> is a series of essays, written over several years, about the way sexuality is constructed through representations. Although the essays can be read in sequence, building on each other to develop a method that analyses both texts and institutional and historical contexts, they can also be used separately, as each essay approaches a different form of representation. The questions raised by the book are those of the relationship of text and context, the spectator/text relation and Kuhn looks not simply at how individual texts work but also at the connections between representation-in-particular and representation-in-general, since her method relates the singular text back to the systems of representational forms and conventional expectations governing the production of pleasure and meaning.

In *Women's Pictures*, Kuhn argued for the analysis of representation as a political act in its own right, as an aid to understanding the ways in which cultural definitions of gender are constructed:

.... the significance of cultural factors (lies) in particular in the form of socially dominant representations of women and the ideological character of such representations both in constituting the category 'woman' and in delimiting and defining what has been called the 'sex/gender system'.<sup>2</sup>

If this analysis is, as she claims, a feminist one while the theories and methods are not exclusively feminist, a number of issues arise. First, what makes it feminist? (How is this knowledge useful to feminism?) Secondly, are other (not specifically feminist) questions relevant in examining how social meanings, identity and experiences are constructed? And thirdly, who and what are the conclusions useful for? Are they solely for feminism or do they carry a wider significance? Of

course, these are questions about how feminism is located in relation to cultural politics generally.

Kuhn's project in her new book is to link representation and sexuality with a feminist desire to *produce knowledge*; which she regards as an essential part of a 'politics of opposition'. She views the endeavour to connect the realm of sexuality—the personal, which has been such an important site of radical intervention in the development of feminist strategy—to the realm of public representations, as a challenge to the way conventional understanding constructs sexuality; as private, individual, intangible.

I want to examine some of the issues involved in addressing questions of how identity and meaning are produced and the way in which critical discourse may contribute to a politics of opposition regarding representation. But first of all I would like to consider how this book could be used—and I would argue that its 'place' is within a context of teaching.

In order to examine the cultural production of meaning, Kuhn mixes two forms of conventionally separated writing: the introduction of various methods of analysis, demonstrating concepts through their practical application; and the construction of a polemical argument for a certain combination of deconstructive methods to produce knowledge that counters the assumptions behind mainstream forms of representation.

The book's strength lies less in originating new theories than in re-working old ones, and in its powers of explanation, drawing together various theoretical terms and applying them to show how they work, what they reveal and, most centrally, why this activity is important from a (feminist) political perspective. This makes it invaluable on booklists for adult and higher education as well as for teachers in secondary and further education attracted to using many of its ideas, if not necessarily terms, to inform their teaching around questions of gender, narrative, representation and realism, etc.

Nonetheless, as a collection of essays developing positions over five or six years, it is uneven in its address. While taking some pains to clarify the processes of voyeuristic and fetishistic looking, for example, a footnote does not explain these terms, but merely references Laura Mulvey's article, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'.<sup>3</sup> Those who have tried teaching about psychoanalysis and cinema know this important article cannot *stand in* as explanation but *needs* explanation itself. There is therefore a confusion as to whether this is a book for those versed in the theories she applies or for students of the media—an inconsistency which could here be circumvented by directing students first to the section on 'Cinema as Image and Sound' in John Ellis' *Visible Fictions*<sup>4</sup> and using this book to build on the delineations he outlines.

But despite its unevenness, this is a *teacherly* book. *Women's Pictures*, though precise and clear, tends to overwhelm the reader with theory and methodology as a background to the analysis of particular films. *The Power of the Image*, while equally informative theoretically, brings its

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<sup>3</sup>Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, Autumn 1975, vol 16 no 3, pp 6-18.

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<sup>4</sup>John Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982.

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method into confrontation with its object. It leads us into conceptual terms by demonstrating their application to representations of women and sexuality.

As such, this collection challenges conventional academic writing by pointing out the issues at stake and different ways of approaching them, so that its readings are not presented as exclusive, nor its methods as absolute or definitive. Each chapter advances a different way of considering particular operations and readings of cinema and photography, the process of representation and its connection to (constructed) sexuality.

One problem here is that representations-in-particular are often used to stand in for representation-in-general. The reader must rely upon a textual analysis in order to understand the way representation works, rather than seeing the text as one factor in the process of representation. We learn about visual codes through pornography, narrative codes through cross-dressing films and practical (studio) censorship through the fragmentary history of a film's production. This may leave us with a slightly suspicious feeling that perhaps there is more to the story of each of these subjects than the examples lead us to believe. Pedagogically, this is a very valid approach, since it continually makes us want to know more, to ask more questions. However, *writing* about film has a certain closure which teaching is not limited by since one can respond to these questions by taking them up at a later stage or in relation to a different example. Here one is still left with suspicion.

This arises partly because the analytical methods chosen do not necessarily derive from the spectator's *experience* of a given representation (even if they may clarify the experience). It may therefore not be immediately obvious how the book and its methods relate to this experience even though it takes the spectator as a central focus of interest. This, in turn, presents further problems. Which spectator-activity are we talking about? Since writing (as distinct from teaching) tends to assume an authoritative address, it can seem to foreclose unwritten options. This authoritative voice, often speaking outside the 'experience' of a representation and presenting an apparently objective perspective, is particularly prevalent in historical and institutional analyses as well as 'readings' of visual texts (and I do not absolve myself here!). It's time that critical writing responded to the questions raised about the validity of this 'objective' voice and considered how we could pose a *subjective* and *diverse*, if academic, address.

This is easier to accomplish in teaching situations where one has to offer sometimes conflicting accounts. In testing out approaches rather than demonstrating them, teachers often find that aspects of the film/video/TV programme not addressed in their methodology are at the forefront of student responses after screenings.

Polemical writing, which *argues for* rather than *tells about*, also invites critical response and dissent by its address. In this book, Kuhn continually probes, looking further than individual methods permit. This is made possible by the connections she draws between different approaches—textual, institutional, cultural and historical—also by the

critical eclecticism characteristic of feminism, continually questioning what it has learned.

While appropriating different types of approach, however, Kuhn's central assertion (it seems to me, perhaps because I disagree with it) is that 'cinematic [but by extension, all] representation [is] autonomously productive of meaning' (p 98). This counteracts the desire of many film historians to understand film as purely illustrative of the social context and instead emphasises the importance of the way representations are constructed. But this can be equally problematic as a strategy if pushed to such extremes, appearing to condone seeing cinema as representation, full stop, rather than as a form of representation, of constructing meanings that draw on and overlap with those circulating outside film, as well as marginalising the knowledge and experiences spectators bring to bear on the film text. Despite her emphatic interest in precisely these areas, Kuhn's choice of methods nonetheless prioritises the text.

*The Power of the Image* opens with an essay by Kuhn and three collaborators, Frances Borzello, Jill Pack and Cassandra Wedd, examining how photographic genres (notably Hollywood glamour portraits and Bellocq's 'documentary' portraits of prostitutes, subsequently appropriated as 'art' photos) construct particular representations of femininity. These images (and the circumstances of their construction) are examined to understand how they position the female spectator, who has 'until very recently been faced with a single option – to identify with the male in the spectator and to see woman, to see herself, as an object of desire' (p 11). However, seeing herself as an object of desire is already *two* options for a woman. As Laura Mulvey has pointed out<sup>5</sup>, one is always split between identification with and desire for the figure in the image; one does not operate in the absence of the other, even if one appears to be emphasised. The 1979 essay necessarily omits the subsequent elaboration of Mulvey's early depiction of the options available to women, broadened (notably by herself<sup>6</sup>) to include a greater sense of the contradictory positions available to a single subject – with female spectators taking up both a masculine position through looking (actively desiring therefore dominant, controlling) while identifying with (recognising themselves in) the position of the object of desire. However, the book's subsequent chapter does acknowledge that 'masculinity is not the same as maleness . . . Women can and do derive pleasure from images of women, a fact which betokens the unfixity of sexual identity and the fluidity of our engagement with certain types of images' (p 31).

To extend this notion of a range of multiple, shifting and fragmented identifications to include forms and processes of identification which operate *outside* constructed visual images would be to take on the spectator's construction through experience. Thus we could consider *each moment* of identification between spectator and text not only in terms of the histories of processes of representation, but also the spectators' histories – the way spectators' identities have been formed from previous positionings in relation to images, ideas, meanings and other material conditions and practices. The way these histories inflect

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<sup>5</sup>Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *op cit*.

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<sup>6</sup>Laura Mulvey, 'Afterthoughts on "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" inspired by *Duel in the Sun*', *Framework* 15/16/17, 1981, pp 12-15.

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the spectator's ability or will to take up the positions offered by *these* images can also be seen in terms of a fragmented process, so that identification with different aspects of the apparently 'whole' position offered is permitted or disallowed by the constitution of the spectator's identity. This means that she/he may take up this position in certain ways while *simultaneously* being aware of its disconnection with her or his own sense of self. The determinant power of the intention seen as governing the text is circumscribed, and other meanings take on as much status as those 'preferred' by the text.

Despite the first essay's dependence on textual operations for interpretation, its concluding remarks point to possibilities of different meanings from those assumed by the way the photographs were initially distributed. The essay stresses Bellocq's potentially 'sympathetic' image of women, ascertained, it seems, largely from the assumption that he was commissioned to take the portraits by their subjects and the fact that the women look at the camera, interpreted as revoking the eroticism of voyeuristic looking and asserting a complicity with the act of 'capturing' the image. Their lack of fit with 'documentary' styles of photography is asserted so that they may be unearthed from the institutional framework of artistic value into which they have been cast. The re-appropriation of meaning nevertheless maintains a formal re-reading (even if governed by institutional factors) and largely ignores the way meaning is formed in the *process* of reading.

Chapter Two, 'Lawless Seeing', an essay on the visual codes of pornography, again uses textual analysis to understand how pleasures are formed and how female sexuality is constructed as 'other'. Female desire is presented as an 'impossible mystery' by these texts, constantly tantalising a presumed male spectator to look beyond the visible while acknowledging that this is a fiction, that pleasure is secured by the knowledge that one's gaze is only at surfaces and that the mystery the spectator seeks to uncover will always remain intact and guarantee the luxury and safety of distance:

*Desire is fuelled because in the final instance its object is unattainable – and unthreatening.* (p 42)

Interwoven with this is an argument that the processes of censorship, which determine which acts may be represented, safeguard the illicit nature of such pleasures while also regulating the way male and female sexuality is constructed, asserting the primacy of heterosexual intercourse precisely through restrictions placed on its visibility, its representability.

This position is intriguing in its dissimilarity from feminist criticism which has operated from the premise that the denial of certain kinds of images of women has marginalised those aspects of their identities, therefore that representation is about what *is* shown, that meaning is derived from presence. In contrast, the connection of the pleasures of pornography with its censorship supports Kuhn's argument that porn-

ography is about what is *not* shown, and that in this lies its power to allow the space for (male) fantasy. Although pornography *may* be read 'against the grain' by spectators who reject the images of conventional sexuality it draws on, Kuhn shows how these fantasies are contained and organised in certain ways by forms of looking which assign positions according to relations of sexuality and gender:

*Women's pleasure is set up as an object of curiosity, which demands investigation simply because it is other. The spectator's gaze is masculine, and the image addresses him as part of the action, constructing his sexuality as masculine. (p 33)*

The major part of this essay examines the way images are constructed to exploit voyeuristic and fetishistic forms of looking in order to sexualise the images of women in a particular way and in a particular relation to the spectator.

What remains unclear is the relation between identity, our sense of self, and these representations (Kuhn acknowledges that spectators may identify with the figure of woman instead of objectifying it through, presumably, a sense of recognition rather than difference). Even more centrally for this piece, it is unclear where we are positioned in relation to the new knowledge derived from the analysis and how this may affect the potential pleasures of such images. If mystery is the key, does a deconstructive exercise giving a different kind of knowledge and perspective debunk the authority of the original pleasure, subverting its power over the spectator – or not?

One of the reasons such a question is important is that Kuhn's approach to pornographic images shows their connection to mainstream images and cultural norms of sexual difference through the forms of looking they exploit (although pornography is more bound up with acknowledging artifice than denying it). Voyeurism allows a 'pleasurable' visual scrutiny of images of women which is likened to investigating the enigma of female sexuality. It also protects the spectator from his or her presence being acknowledged, maintaining the illusion that one is peeping in on an erotic scene. Fetishism reduces the castrating threat of an 'other' body, fragmenting it and, in so doing, underlines the obsessive eroticisation of parts of the body signifying sexual difference or connoting sexual activity (genitals, breasts, open mouths). This provides a way of restating sexual relations, enabling the spectator to be 'caught up' in the scenarios these divisions imply, placed in a position of power over the dehumanised object of sexual desire. This position of power is offered to the spectator as he/she is invited to enter into the game, the artifice, of display and looking, with a complicit – therefore subordinated – object of his/her pleasure.

Kuhn concentrates on analysing images of women from a feminist perspective. It would be interesting, and just as useful to a feminist project, I would argue, to conduct a similarly detailed comparison of how men are presented in pornography and indeed in dominant repre-

sentations, particularly in terms of the strategies of looking which operate. What would this do for the assumption that only *women* and objectification 'go together'? Might other factors, such as class and race, equally well be hierarchised into such positions in a way which is also organised according to categories of difference (Burt Lancaster and Paul Robeson might be suitable examples), destabilising the definition of a controlling spectator as always masculine? (A definition which was, after all, only taken from the preposterous equation of activity with masculinity which psychoanalytic criticism does not altogether escape.) To make connections in the way systems of representation work to impose a structure of power and dominance across several categories of meaning (race, class, gender, sexuality) might lead on from understanding unconscious factors to consider the complexity of other forms of identification and social relations.

The approaches that Kuhn employs emphasise the structures and positions offered and the meanings proposed by the texts themselves. This leaves out two quite major areas of activity and contradiction: first, in the relation between the spectator and the text. Certain aspects of the spectator's identity and experience may be confirmed by the positions offered to him/her (therefore inducing some form of engagement with the text) while other aspects may be in conflict with them. The spectator's position for making meaning from the text is constructed from the position he/she is offered by it *and* the history of his/her own identities/identifications. So the construction of meaning by the spectator is, in fact, dependent on the process of interaction between social/cultural identity (and the process of constructing it through identifications) and those positions or versions of identity which are offered or assumed by the text.

This leads to a second area of contradiction, for while this interaction is one of conflict, cultural identity is itself made up of conflicting categories which may not share a common position within the hierarchy imposed by cultural definitions of status and dominance. (One's class may allow one a different relation to standard norms than one's gender or race, yet Kuhn's analysis neglects the discourses of class and race.) This contradictory constitution of identity may provide the momentum behind reading, or the production of meanings, which take a quite different point of entry than that 'assumed' by the text. So a double level of 'mismatches' and competing discourses may be possible.

These disparities are not taken into account by those approaches which share with the text an assumption of a 'unified' spectator who coheres exactly with that posited by the text. And so they cannot take account of the potential for differential readings which come from the disparities and contradictions in the relation of spectator and text and in the way in which the spectator produces meaning. Differential readings come not only from the absences and gaps in the text, but also the gaps in the analysis itself, the point at which new questions have to be asked of the analysis.

Kuhn's response to these absences is to expand beyond textual analysis

into approaches which consider other discourses on sexual difference (particularly in films whose narrative deals with cross-dressing), institutional operations (*The Big Sleep*), and the social discourses which films act to support and within which they are made comprehensible (the VD propaganda films of the First World War and after).

These approaches rely on putting one or more films at the centre of the analytical operation, even though it becomes increasingly clear that what is most interesting is the way those knowledges not only produce questions that textual reading can say nothing about but sometimes even work against meanings the readings assume. To retain such a strong investment in the text manifests an impulse towards the academic rather than the teacherly, the wish to produce exact knowledge, specific definitions and complete accounts. As I've implied, I think Kuhn works against these impulses and against the now orthodox textual readings to which psychoanalysis has contributed. Of course, psychoanalysis has also provided an awareness of subjectivity in the relation between text and spectator which allows us to move away from the text. But this move still presents problems for feminism, both in film studies and in the context of women's studies and cultural studies, problems based on the difficulties of accounting for questions of cultural identity beyond those positions determined by texts, forming a politics that combines material and intellectual interventions and developing a relationship between feminist and cultural politics.

Kuhn explores the link between text and spectator in the cultural definitions and knowledges called upon by films in which sexuality and gender are at the forefront. Her chapter on 'Sexual Disguise and Cinema', perhaps the most useful in the book, examines the relation of narrative and spectacle through an argument that film conventionally equates visibility with truth (or, in narrative terms, knowledge). She analyses these formal operations (particularly of *Some Like It Hot*) to establish how sexual difference is maintained in films which reorganise the visual signs conventionally signifying gender. In a dense but fascinating formulation, Kuhn demonstrates the ideological bases of sexual difference:

*Discourses on gender identity and sexual difference hold together a range of notions centring on biological sex, social gender, sexual identification and sexual object choice. The incorporation of these in constructs of gender identity is a historically-grounded ideological project whose effect, it has been argued, has been to set up a heterogeneous and determinate set of biological, physical, social, psychological and psychic constructs as a unitary, fixed and unproblematic attribute of human subjectivity. (p 52)*

Films which feature cross-dressing as a narrative disruption, she argues, also disrupt the apparent equivalence of these categories and the order of sexual difference, and hence 'denaturalise' sexual identity, showing subjectivity to be constructed rather than natural, and therefore changeable rather than fixed.

Kuhn's use of narrative codification to 'understand' what dominant

discourses 'say' about such disruptions leads occasionally to rather limiting formulations, such as the assumption that the 'overarching narrative viewpoint' (the 'voice' of the text, giving the spectator a privileged knowledge of the characters' 'true' gender while it provides the basis of narrative confusions) provides a point of view that ushers the spectator into pre-regulated positions. What this fails to consider is that 'narrative' viewpoint is often momentarily abandoned for a particular character viewpoint based on *partial* knowledge. Shifting positions are offered which spectators may take up and move across.

The idea that spectators may resist the reading ostensibly offered by the text challenges the authority of the visible. What is shown may not make sense if it contradicts the already existing beliefs of the spectator. Such readings 'against the grain' can be investigated as a counter-strategy, whether for female viewers, for teaching, or for film-makers who challenge conventional presumptions about address and identification.

The question of a framework of cultural meanings is taken up by Kuhn's final chapter on 'health' propaganda films which draws together textual (narrative) analysis, social discourses circulating around sexual morality and the institutional historical context. The emphasis is on how history can be used to illuminate the practices of film, but the knowledge produced by such an analysis can be useful in understanding a wider range of operations. This essay is one of the most successful, examining how ideas about health education and sexual morality are culturally constructed and the way certain films are able to articulate public concerns.

I would also like to have seen some consideration of a possible range of spectatorial positions, rather than the audience assumed by the film-makers. What about those women whose social position in relation to the family, sexuality, moral codes, etc, would have been more ambivalent than the intended audience? How would they have regarded the figure of the fallen temptress and her responsibility for weakening the character of male warriors? And what of those on the straight and narrow who nevertheless recognised in themselves the *wish* for a freer life and sexual autonomy?

At this point I would like to consider how a definition of 'representation' can be formulated. Its usage appears superficially clear, but with further investigation it seems to open out until one realises there really is not a centre, a range of essential concepts, codes or conventions which sum it up. Ann Kaplan, in the glossary of terms at the beginning of *Women and Film*, defines it in the following, quite conventionally accepted, way:

*This concept indicates the 'constructed' nature of the image... which Hollywood mechanisms strive to conceal. The dominant Hollywood style, realism (an apparent imitation of the social world we live in), hides the fact that a film is constructed, and perpetuates the illusion that spectators are being shown what is 'natural'. The half-aware 'forgetting' that the spectator engages in allows the pleasurable mechanisms of voyeurism and fetishism to flow more freely.<sup>7</sup>*

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<sup>7</sup> E Ann Kaplan,  
*Women and Film*,  
London, Methuen,  
1983, p 13.

To state the fact of construction is merely to restate the problem—to show up ‘representedness’, that a text *is* constructed, is to say nothing at all about the nature of its construction and the production of meanings. What, we might ask, is the relationship between an image’s ‘constructedness’ and the meanings its mimetic appearance solicits? What *is* this state of ‘half-aware forgetting’? Does it mean we are inactive and senseless? And just how free from our intervention is ‘more freely’? These uncertainties show, I think, that such a definition misses out any consideration of *how* meanings are produced.

While using a much more penetrating approach, Annette Kuhn does not entirely meet this problem head-on. The way she uses ‘representation’ in her introduction is rather elusive; again it is assumed that we all share a knowledge of what it refers to. And it is representations which the term eventually describes (just as in Ann Kaplan’s usage ‘the image’, ‘a film’, ‘the illusion’ are bracketed by the term), foregrounding the product rather than the activity of producing. While I am not suggesting that Kuhn fails to acknowledge this process (the most interesting and new aspects of her writings here, particularly those essays on cross-dressing films and VD propaganda features, precisely attempt to uncover the hidden relations of the process of representing) she nevertheless places the emphasis on *products* (films, images, texts) *first*.

This prioritisation of the product has developed historically along with diverse theories and critical approaches and provides a different formulation of the commercial activity of obscuring relations of cultural production, the product ‘unifying’ the contradictory impulses which contribute to its apparent wholeness. In the case of criticism, the text can be used to ‘open out’ these contradictory forces, but still they are perversely *contained* in its own rewriting. Such methods perpetuate the ‘wholeness’ of the text by attesting to the completeness of its symptomatic statement, of the range of its meanings; ultimately, it seems, everything that can be said is voiced in the text somewhere or active as a ‘structuring absence’.

Kuhn’s approach stresses that meanings not only derive from the forms and codes of conventional representation, but also from what the spectator does with images in particular times and places, as well as the way their circulation as commodities influences the way they are read. But despite her important refutation of the text’s sufficiency as source of all potential meaning, she retains the ‘instance of looking’ as that which provides the link between text and spectator. This offers a way of seeing how the text ‘regulates’ the activity of the spectator.

But while Kuhn opens out the process of making meaning to a wider range of influences and activities than those attached to the text itself, the traditional attitude to the text is somehow left intact. It is still seen as a representation (in its wholeness) even if what is done with and to it is now *also* being considered. This is what allows her to use a triangular model of spectator-text-social formation—each term set apart from the other.

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<sup>8</sup> See Cary Bazalgette's paper on 'Representation', BFI Easter School, 1985, and Richard Dyer's section on 'Representation' in 'Taking Popular Television Seriously', David Lusted and Phillip Drummond (eds), *TV and Schooling*, British Film Institute Education Department in association with University of London Institute of Education, 1985, pp 44-45.

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<sup>9</sup> Terry Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism*, London, Verso, 1984, p 124.

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To some extent this reproduces the current division of critical labour, with feminist criticism still focused on women's experience and separate from forms of criticism that emphasise other aspects of cultural experience. To provide a different understanding of representation, one that acknowledges that we are more than 'just' women, we have to recast the terms of our understanding of representation as a *process*. Looking is *one* term in this process but need not be central. Aside from the point that popular forms are always more than solely visual, if we understand representation as a term that refers to the process of making meanings and the way in which this relates to culturally formed categories of meaning, experience and identity (i.e., the way these meanings are lived out and acted on), then the spectator/text relation is wider than the 'instance of looking'. The text does not exist only at the moment of its viewing but is recast in memory, related to other texts, worked over in relation to other ideas and connected to other experiences, both similar and different. The texts, then, intervening in all of these processes by the way in which it is (and *allows* itself to be) taken up by the spectator and *made sense of*, is emphatically more than just visual.

It may be more useful to consider representation in terms of process: addressed from a position (ambivalent, shifting, contradictory) to a range of positions.<sup>8</sup> To get at the positions offered by the process of representation and the way they are taken up is to see the text itself as part of a set of relations, which while structured according to a hierarchy (of the power to speak and be recognised in one's speech), is always open to a recasting, seeing meanings according to a range of differences rather than as unequivocal, as established through a series of norms against which difference is measured.

Terry Eagleton recently recommended a political criticism which would address processes of signification:

*without a more profound understanding of... symbolic processes, through which political power is deployed, we shall be incapable of unlocking the most lethal power-struggles now confronting us.*<sup>9</sup>

Yet in the power struggle he envisages our only role is to 'resist' or 'subvert' – where is the expression of *our* meanings? Again, the text is the 'truth' against which we measure our own deviation and from there and there only can we assert its falsity. How long must we maintain this oppositional position? When will we recast the production of meaning, to propose that we consider *our meanings, our positions, our identities*, forming a really radical critical practice?

Kuhn goes further than Eagleton in acknowledging the importance of one's own contradictorily pleasurable relation to images which on other levels disavow our experience:

*In analysing such images... it is possible, indeed necessary, to acknowledge their pleasurable qualities, precisely because pleasure is an area of analysis in its own right. 'Naïve' pleasure, then, becomes admissible. And the acts of*

analysis, of deconstruction and of reading 'against the grain' offer an additional pleasure—the pleasure of resistance, of saying 'no': not to 'unsophisticated' enjoyment, by ourselves and others, of culturally dominant images, but to the structures of power which ask us to consume them uncritically and in highly circumscribed ways. (p 8)

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<sup>10</sup> Ian Green, 'Malefunction', *Screen* July-October 1984, vol 25 nos 4-5, pp 37 and 47.

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Yet, while these pleasurable connections are analysed for their contradictions, it seems that the potential for subversion exists elsewhere, in the 'additional' pleasure of refusing to be contained by the power relations, rather than *deriving from* these contradictions *themselves*.

Ian Green, in a recent article about masculinity in film, has warned against analyses which maintain and reproduce the same hierarchy of norms that they apparently oppose. By continually describing the ways in which these norms are established, we concede them an unwarranted centrality:

*My worry is that analysis is beginning to uphold these norms in order to confirm their operation, tautologically, in cinema....*

*Given the wide-ranging and all-pervasive definitions that Freudian psycho-analysis gives to the sexual we should be very cautious about what the 'norm' might be in cinema (and anywhere else). If, as I suggested earlier, the norms are defined in relation to woman as sexual object and the presence of the sexual in terms of representations of genital intercourse, then any 'departure' from these—male bonding, male sartorial beauty, male-to-male violence in westerns, epics and war films—is by definition a displacement, a repression, perversion, and so on.<sup>10</sup>*

Without a form of analysis that considers subjectivity on all levels, that considers us as *social* subjects, that takes on the possibility of a number of different meanings being produced simultaneously with 'preferred' meanings, we are left with nothing but the norms and hierarchies explained to us—that which conventional cinema might want us to think—while suppressing our suspicions that it often doesn't work like that. Dominant forms of analysis delimit the boundaries of their own investigation and produce new knowledge in their own image. That which they are capable of finding they find—that which they cannot speak remains unheard and unspeakable. A different perspective is required to indicate the nature of their silences.

To ask questions, and to ask questions of one's asking, is the overriding value of feminist theories and forms of criticism. The pleasure of Annette Kuhn's new collection is that while she shows how, for instance, voyeurism and fetishism structure the spectator into a particular relation to pornographic images, she *can* ask questions that do not derive from the analysis she is constructing, but from an insight gained from her feminist perspective. In order to find a critical position, it is necessary, at times, to ask questions of what already exists.

This is a first stage, which takes a description of the structures of the dominant as its starting point. For it to challenge what exists, to educate,



to voice what has been kept silent, something else is required to fill these gaps. If these questions are effective, the weight of them will break down the structures they address. And once this deconstruction takes place, something must be built up in its place. So, in addition to glorifying in the questions, to celebrating the illumination of these gaps, we have to see what arises from the questions. What is the new knowledge that Kuhn talks of as being essential to and deriving from a feminist critical activity?

I would suggest that examining the positions offered within culture and the contradictory ways these are taken up, could unlock power relations. This would be a politics of subjectivity, acknowledging its place in redefining meanings through the recasting of positions according to the imperatives of social and cultural experience—a critical practice that would emanate from the contradictions of cultural experience and the social production of knowledge, *disorganising* the text rather than allowing it to disorganise us.

The importance in finding a form of criticism that derives from a politics of subjectivity is twofold. First, by avoiding an approach that maintains the dominance of conventional forms and meanings, we are no longer locked into our own marginalisation, our own ‘difference from’. To take into account the *range* of positions presents us with a series of interacting categories and feminism ceases to be isolated in its own discourses (and ceases to marginalise others). We can construct a politics of representation which takes in feminist positions and also forms alliances across positions centring on race, class and sexuality. Secondly, it allows the ‘production of knowledge’ to acknowledge its own perspective and prevents it laying claim to ‘objectivity’ as an effacement of the critical activity itself.

It would be too easy to suggest that current critical methods are moribund and that we should construct a new subjective critical practice that rejects all the previous outworn models. But I am suggesting that we need to *transform* criticism *according to* a notion of subjectivity that has to some extent historically derived from these methods. And I see Annette Kuhn’s project as an important step in this transformation, one which, while I may disagree with her emphases, takes on those issues and attempts to move away from the ease of conventional approaches. *The Power of the Image* provokes the reader to find her/his own points of agreement and dissent by the forceful presentation of its alignment.

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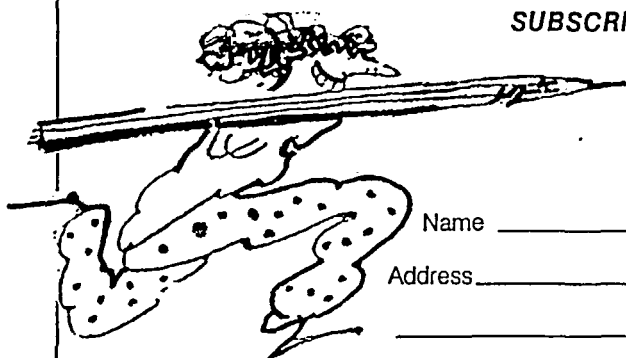
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**TWO FREE ISSUES FOR NEW SUBSCRIBERS**

# MAKING SENSE FOR WHOM?

BY CARY BAZALGETTE

It may seem churlish to feel depressed on recognising that *Making Sense of the Media*<sup>1</sup> could claim to represent the 'state of the art' for Media Studies in the mid-1980s. Churlish, because there's no denying that it offers a very full coverage of the theory which informs a lot of current media teaching. Depressing, because what appear to me as its yawning gaps and outrageous misconstructions have hardly disturbed most commentators and reviewers. More depressing still, because as yet very little can be pointed to as filling those gaps and correcting those misconstructions.

The generator of this emotional turmoil is a hefty tome of some quarter-million words, handily (but, I suspect, expensively) divided up into ten saddlestitched booklets, lavishly—though muddily—illustrated and costing £25. Just what it is you might be hard put to discover when reading Comedia's catalogue or browsing in the bookshop. In some places it describes itself as an actual *course* in Media Studies. In others it becomes, more vaguely, a 'framework through which an integrated media studies course can be taught'. It promises to 'help teachers develop ideas, projects and classroom practice'. One of the booklets is an Introduction; the rest divide into three blocks of three units each: 'The World of Images'; 'The Industry of Images' and 'Images of the Audience'.

Searching for some clue as to phase or sector, we find that the booklets are aimed primarily at the English specialist but also at teachers of sociology, politics, general/liberal and communication studies. This list implies the

14-18 age range though this is never explicitly stated, and some pre-publicity suggested it would be of use in the primary phase. A veritable *vade-mecum* for the aspiring media teacher, it would appear, precluding the need to purchase anything else.

In reality, much that is promised is not delivered, and much is delivered that is not promised. Let's take the good news first. Block One starts with a thought-provoking and accessible analysis of photographs, working through polysemy and captioning, cropping, context and representation. It's like a well-delivered and aptly illustrated lecture and forms an excellent overview of the critical analysis of photographs. It would encourage any teacher to go and try a bit of similar work. An INSET tutor could base a course unit on this section more or less as it stands.

Well, they would if they could—but they can't. The picture reproduction is atrocious and the images are only barely readable in the booklet: photocopied, they are a mess. Far more annoying, though, is the lack of reference or accurate sourcing (not even a copyright acknowledgement, one can't help noticing). You do get some helpful hints on how to make colour slides from TV, but that doesn't relate *too* closely to the rest of the text, which is about news and documentary photography. And even if you

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<sup>1</sup> John Hartley, Holly Goulden and Tim O'Sullivan, *Making Sense of the Media*, London, Comedia, 1985. (Page references will be included in the text.)

thought you could at least do something similar if you knew where to start – forget it: there’s not a single reference to *any* of the teaching packs currently available: not to *Eyeopeners*<sup>2</sup>; not to *Talking Pictures*<sup>3</sup>; nor *The Market*<sup>4</sup>, or even *Reading Pictures* and *Selling Pictures*<sup>5</sup>. Going through the whole boxful of booklets, the same phenomenon recurs; introductions, background reading, scene-setting aplenty; resources, how to do it, where to go next – virtually nothing. Block Three, Units One and Two, come close to being an exception, containing detailed, referenced exercises, one of which – the best in the pack by a long chalk – is actually designed by a teacher; but more of pedagogy later.

Maybe they reckoned that, having shelled out £25 for this lot, most teachers wouldn’t be able to afford anything else. In that they are probably right. What the teacher is assumed to have plenty of is – time:

*There are other, equally appropriate, ways of dealing with the same topics, and the methods we outline may be applicable to quite different matters from those we discuss. To get full benefit from the course, you should read it, then raid it.* (Introduction, Section Two, p15)

The overall implication here is that the booklets do not constitute a course that can be taught, but a range of background reading and possibilities for classroom work which you then have to construct (using what criteria?) into a teachable course. However, since the booklets are, as one reviewer enthused ‘presented with plenty of practical exercises for students to follow’<sup>6</sup>, perhaps the intention is that the various ‘Exercises’ and ‘Projects’ (no, I never found out what the difference was) in boxed, bold type that are inserted throughout the set, will together form the ‘coherent subject area’ expressed in terms of classroom practice. That’s certainly what the Comedia catalogue promises.

With this in mind, one eagerly turns the pages, to be confronted with this, the first project in the pack:

*Morse’s comments could provide a useful starting point for discussion of the different ways in which men and women are ‘displayed’ visually. You’ll see opposite<sup>7</sup> a range of examples of sporting stars, beauty queens and models posing for the camera or ‘captured’ in action. Try analysing the photographs*

*semiotically: compare the pose, eye contact, dress etc of the men and women and consider the mode of address (who it’s ‘talking’ to). Analyse also, the way in which the display is anchored (fixed and made sense of) by the text.* (Block One, Unit One, p 39)

Got that, fourth years? When you’ve had a jolly interesting discussion on that, we’ll go on to ‘compare the way in which men and women sport stars are anchored in news reports’ (p 39) and after that we can get on to some practical (sic) work:

*One way of opening up this aspect of gender representation would be to compile scrap books of male and female sporting stars. Collect articles, interviews and listen to sports commentaries to discover how they are ‘made sense of’ as they compete in the (predominantly masculine) world of sport. Trace some of the different media forms in which the chosen personalities inhabit – chat shows, quiz-shows, sports panels, advertisements. If they do advertise, what kind of products do they promote and what image are they being used to project?* (ibid).

And for homework, I’d like you to answer this question: ‘To what extent do they come to represent more than success in sport, and are the qualities endowed gendered?’ (ibid).

These do not look to me like ‘questions to start discussion’. Not only because of the language, the generality of the concepts, but also because I don’t know any media teachers who’d have the temerity to start a media course with gender representation.

We press on to the next project, which suggests, ‘Provide the class with newspapers and magazines and ask them to compile individual or group scrap books of images of Britain...’ (Block One, Unit One, p 51). The make-a-scrap-book-then-discuss-it syndrome recurs throughout

<sup>2</sup> Andrew Bethell, Cambridge University Press, 1981.

<sup>3</sup> Mike Clarke and Peter Baker, Mary Glasgow Press, 1981.

<sup>4</sup> Inner London Education Authority, 1975.

<sup>5</sup> British Film Institute Publications, 1981 and 1983 respectively.

<sup>6</sup> Graham Wade, *Stills*, November 1985, p 8.

<sup>7</sup> No you won’t. The first of many little editorial slip-ups.

## Exercise

A project simulating the production process and role divisions of an advertising agency should prove productive in a classroom setting. The class could be divided into the seven roles that were outlined in the agency itself, plus groups representing the customer company and the media outlet. It may be helpful to devise beforehand a general outline of the problem with which the agency is to be confronted with a pre-selected product and a given set of demands from the account - perhaps a particular market that the product/advertisement is to appeal to, or a particular image that the customer wants to project. To simulate the kinds of decisions that the plans board would have to contend with, it may be useful to ensure that the initial information is partial; it is unusual for the customer to be 100% sure of all aspects of the campaign that the company wants to launch. To add an element of unpredictability to the exercise, you may also like to confront the teams with an unexpected element, late in the production process - for example, a sudden change in scheduling, if the media outlet is television or radio.

Alternatively, you may prefer to select an actual product to be advertised - a school event, magazine or newspaper, for

example. In this case, field research could be undertaken to define both the prospective market for the product and to indicate a suitable image for the advertisement or publicity campaign.

In either context, it is likely that notions of professional practice will, at some point, arise. The pupils, for example, may set out with strong ideas of what an advertisement 'should' look like and set about replicating many of the conventions that are taken for granted. Alternatively, qualitative judgements may be made about their own final product, assessing it positively or negatively against the 'real thing'. This could prove a useful starting point for discussion of the kind of ideas about professionalism that you will meet in the remainder of this unit. The purpose of the simulation, then, is not simply to learn about what professionals do, but also to open up and discuss the wider implications of routinized media practice, role divisions and expertise.

For a useful resource, 'The (new improved) Brand X Game', a pack designed to simulate the practices of an advertising agency, contact:

Media Education Development Project  
74, Victoria Crescent Road,  
Glasgow G12 9JN.

Simulation as a pedagogic strategy: sample exercise from *Making Sense of Media*.

the booklets, not in so many words, but as a pedagogic 'strategy': assembling and discussing TV interviews (Block One, Unit Three, p 14); assembling and discussing representations of new technologies (Block Two, Unit Two, pp 14-15); assembling and discussing programmes about the police (Block One, Unit Three, pp 21-23). The questions offered for all these classroom discussions can be guaranteed to have an interesting effect in any fourth or fifth year secondary classroom on a Friday afternoon:

*How have interview styles historically changed on TV?* (Block One, Unit Three, p 15)

*To what extent can you find evidence for the two modes of centred and decentred biography?* (ibid, p 35)

I'm not objecting that the concepts here are too

abstruse for secondary school students. I'm objecting to the pedagogy, or rather, the blithe disregard for it. 'Discussion', as a pedagogic tool, often has its uses, and demands a lot of skill from chair and participants, as the survivors of many a conference and summer school can testify. How often it can be used, in school classrooms of 25 and more students especially, and how well it works, and when it can be better than other pedagogic modes, are questions well worth asking. They are rarely asked. 'We had an interesting discussion', it will be asserted. Interesting for whom? Who learned what?<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> See Cary Bazalgette, Neil Galbraith and Danny Padmore, 'You Saw All the Sweat - an Examination of Classroom Discussion Through Tape Transcript', *Screen Education* 15, Summer 1975, pp 25-42.

Still, discussion is not the only strategy that Hartley *et al* employ. The whole of the second block, and much of the third, deal with notoriously slippery concepts in media studies: industry and audience. A great deal of useful information on these areas is on offer. But as we know, the key question that has bedevilled these areas for at least twelve years is, how do you teach this information? How do you motivate students to see it as necessary information? How much of it is necessary? How do you enable students to assimilate the information that will be useful to them, and to retain it? What will the information *then* enable them to do? The answer that is most often, but tentatively, trotted out is that simulation exercises *might* help... tentatively, because a real simulation exercise is elaborate to set up, requires a large amount of background material, and high motivation on the part of students to sustain it and reflect upon it afterwards. The major examples are the *Nine Graded Simulations* pack which contains *Radio Covingham*<sup>9</sup>, ripped off by all and sundry for many a year now and adapted to video by Roger Martin and no doubt others.

There are many simulation-type exercises that do not involve full role-play but do require students to go through some of the processes to be learned about, such as the scheduling game proposed in Len Masterman's *Teaching about Television*<sup>10</sup> and extensively adapted by teachers including Mike Clarke in his prototype board game *The Rating Battle*. This history of qualms and hesitations is as nothing to the authors. In exercise after exercise, we find:

*Simulations are useful ways to develop any of the issues raised in the preceding discussion....* (Block Two, Unit One, pp 18-19, proposing simulations on newspapers, radio interviews, TV News Production and News Values, all detailed in two A4 pages.)

*You might find it useful to set up some TV production simulations....* (p 23)

*A project simulating the production process and role-divisions of an advertising agency should prove productive in a classroom setting....* (p 33)

*One way to open up discussion of the development of the newspaper industry would be to conduct a simulation exercise built around the radical press of the nineteenth century....* (Block Two, Unit Three, p 15)

*A useful way in which to draw out the complexity and tension of the relationship between broadcaster and the state is through simulation exercises....* (ibid, p 33)

*Simulations provide a way in to the daily working practices of TV and it is here, rather than as an exceptional occurrence, that we can best approach censorship.* (ibid, p 38)

In all, there are ten simulations or quasi-simulations cited in the booklets and not once are the questions of what a simulation is and why it is so allegedly effective as a pedagogic strategy, ever addressed.

This disregard for the situation of the classroom teacher comes out even more strongly in the pack's third main piece of pedagogic advice: 'research'. See, for example, Block Two, Unit Two: 'To open up this area, you might like to spend some time examining the processes of "invention" and "discovery" which are commonly held to be the "causes" of different media' (p 14). A little later, students could investigate 'the history of pirate radio from the early 1960s to the present day. Research for such a project need not depend entirely on books', the authors add helpfully, presumably because this is a passage in the second person, addressed direct to students, unlike the other project in the same 'box', which is clearly addressed to teachers (Block Two, Unit Three, p 15).

It is instructive to note the airy generality of the advice in these sections: 'develop issues', 'open up discussion', 'draw out the complexity', 'provide a way in'. What a wasteland of recalcitrant children and disconsolate teachers these resolutely cheerful and depressingly familiar phrases conjure up! The job of fitting all this theory into all those classrooms is simply handed over to the (overworked, underpaid) teacher. It doesn't really seem to have occurred to either the writing team or their editors that there *are* issues of pedagogy to be addressed. There is, indeed, an inept collation in Block Three, Unit Three of texts on 'progressive' and 'authoritarian' pedagogies. 'Pedagogy is no less controversial an issue than the subject area

<sup>9</sup> Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1983.

<sup>10</sup> London, Macmillan, 1980.

itself, they warn, implying a separation of 'form' and 'content' that is entirely commensurate with their general implication elsewhere: this is the body of knowledge, now go and teach it.

But pedagogy is more than the question 'how do you teach it?', so often, and wrongly, glossed as 'how do you make it easier/bring all that down to the pupils' level?' It's not only a question of how you construct a body of knowledge, but how you select from it, the criteria used for selection, how students are enabled to perceive it as useful knowledge. In fact, a body of knowledge cannot be constructed *without* an implicit pedagogy. So of course, this pack has its own pedagogy, its own 'hidden curriculum'. It is the pedagogy of higher education: the assemblage of texts, the presentation of argument, the demonstration with examples, the concluding discussion. It's a relentlessly authoritarian and one-way transaction where the spaces for questioning, opposition and alternative versions are ruthlessly curtailed. Implicit in this approach is the notion that *school* pedagogies are just not that important, only need tacking on the end of all-important theories which are just unproblematically 'there'.

Given a different pedagogy then, what kind of questions, oppositions and alternatives might be mounted by the punters who have been relieved of their £25? The pack is addressed, it says, primarily to English teachers. Might we expect, therefore, some correlation between the concerns of the pack and the concerns of English and how that has changed and is changing, not least through encounters with structuralism, cultural studies and media theory? We might, but we wouldn't get it.

In fact, English is demolished pretty smartly in the first booklet. The tools for this demolition are furnished by a quite staggeringly naive misreading of *Popular TV and Schoolchildren*<sup>11</sup> plus an excerpt from *Curriculum Matters: English 5-16*<sup>12</sup>, which are pitched against a quick-fire summary of the first chapter of Eagleton's *Literary Theory*<sup>13</sup>. This motley collection of texts proves, we are told, that English and Media Studies are in a state of mutual suspicion and name-calling; the central concern of English teachers is to preserve a neo-Leavisite elitism and eschew the political at all costs.

If this kind of assertion were merely a side-swipe engendered by arrogance and ignorance, it would be bad enough. But, as one reads on, it

becomes clear that, in spite of their acknowledgment (Introduction, p 28) that English and Media Studies will continue to learn from each other, the authors are determined that Media Studies has nothing to learn from English. Central to their project is the establishment of Sociology – and Sociology in Higher Education at that – as the fountainhead of all knowledge about the media.

The authors justify this coup by arguing that

*English and Media Studies are, in fact concerned with the same object of study. Both are devoted to exploring the social production of meaning, and both are interested not only in what meanings are in circulation, but how they are produced. . . . The media are not the enemy of English; on the contrary, English is itself devoted to the study of oral and written media.* (Introduction, p 28)

Now, it's news to me that English teachers are opposed to Media Studies. Most of the Media Studies I know about is being done by English teachers; most study events on Media Studies attract a majority of students who are English teachers. But this inconvenient fact is overlooked by the authors, who want to argue that, as English has become hopelessly corrupted by evaluative and discriminatory criticism, the only hope for a proper study of the media is to let Sociology dictate how it may be done.

But there is a reverse implication here also. If English has been guilty of selecting arbitrarily from the media in order to construct 'the literary', Sociology has been equally guilty of selecting arbitrarily from the media in order to construct 'the socially significant'. The authors define the purpose of *their* Media Studies thus: 'a good way of studying contemporary society', it 'leads inexorably to examining society's norms and beliefs, contradictions and forms of opposition, resistance or alternatives' (Introduction, p 9). It also leads inexorably, we find, to studying advertising, current affairs, documentary and sport; to studying representation and ideology. It leads inexorably

<sup>11</sup> Department of Education and Science, 1983.

<sup>12</sup> Department of Education and Science, 1984.

<sup>13</sup> Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1983, pp 17-53.

away from studying fictional forms, pleasure and aesthetics.

It becomes painfully obvious at many points in *Making Sense of the Media*, that the authors' framework of investigation simply cannot deal with crucial aspects of how the media actually do make sense. Two examples must suffice. The first booklet opens with a two-page spread of caricature images called 'Screen Tests: Twelve Ways to Keep Alert While Watching TV'. Perhaps the silliest reads:

*Watch for the hackneyed conventions of film realism – like cutting from the outside of a building to a group of people talking indoors. What makes you think it's the same building? It almost never is.* (Introduction, p 6)

An irresistible parody comes to mind:

*Watch for the hackneyed conventions of Renaissance drama – like a character on stage telling you where the action is taking place. What makes you think you're in Illyria? You almost never are.*

In other words, *Making Sense...* can't make sense of the kind of active engagement with a text that we used to call 'the willing suspension of disbelief'. Without this concept you cannot make sense of the audience's relationship with *Crossroads* or *Hi-de-Hi!*; the pleasures of playing upon convention and expectation cannot be addressed.

Another sociological chestnut is rolled out in Block One, Unit Three (p 15):

*... recent studies of television news coverage of industrial disputes have suggested that the immediate surroundings and locations of interviews can be very important.... workers are more likely to be interviewed in groups, in the street, in noisy surroundings etc, while management are more likely to be filmed in surroundings which help to lend authority to their statements....*

I once observed a teacher confidently embarking on the *Bad News* thesis with a nice piece of TV news on video and a group of recalcitrant third years, who argued succinctly that the authoritative figure was the *worker*, speaking in a strong regional accent and clearly filmed at the actual factory, while the dubious and untrustworthy figure was Thatcher, represented only by a

photograph, (they didn't care about the low-angle shot and heroic lighting) and spoken for by somebody else (they ignored the fact that 'somebody else' was a BBC newsreader – probably equally suspect in their view). The teacher was flummoxed. Maybe he lacked their agility to cross-refer generic conventions: in realist drama, the form *they* watched most, regional accents and location shooting have high authenticity. It's harder to understand why he didn't know that class, like other social categories, will inflect readings: do working class kids really see management figures in boardrooms as having more authority than people in the workplace who look like their own parents?

In fact, some 50,000 words later in the pack, you *do* come up against a good critique of effects research, uses and gratifications theory, encoding and decoding, and the notion of dominant/negotiated/oppositional readings. Typically, though, the authors cannot conceive of this as anything other than another chunk of theory to do exercises on. (In case you want to know, these comprise (a) reproducing Fiske's semantic differential from *Introduction to Communication Studies*<sup>14</sup> – once you've worked out that half of it is printed on the wrong page; and (b) reproducing Morley's *Nationwide*<sup>15</sup> audience survey. Yes, just like that.) Why no one thought this section might have some relevance to the sections on Representation, it's a little hard to tell. Did different team members write different bits? Did they do this one after they'd got 'consumer reaction to the first bit? Not a lot is made of the editorial role in this enterprise – perhaps wisely.

Unfortunately, the authors never confront the real implications of their assertion that English and Media Studies have the same object of study. In a nimble piece of self-contradiction, they disclaim responsibility for 'popular fiction or theatre, for the purely pragmatic reason that they will be covered elsewhere in the school syllabus' (Introduction, p 10). This saves them from having to answer the really radical demands that

<sup>14</sup> John Fiske, *Introduction to Communication Studies*, London, Methuen, 1982.

<sup>15</sup> David Morley, *The 'Nationwide' Audience*, London, British Film Institute, 1980.



36 Eagleton goes on to make in the text whose earlier sections they draw upon so happily:

*There are many goals to be achieved, and many ways of achieving them. In some situations the most productive procedure may be to explore how the signifying systems of the 'literary' text produce certain ideological effects; or it may be a matter of doing the same with a Hollywood film. Such projects may prove particularly important in teaching cultural studies to children; but it may also be valuable to use literature to foster in them a sense of linguistic potential denied to them by their social conditions. There are 'utopian' uses of literature of this kind, and a rich tradition of such utopian thought which should not be airily dismissed as 'idealist'. The active enjoyment of cultural artefacts should not, however, be relegated to the primary school, leaving older students with the grimmer business of analysis. Pleasure, enjoyment, the potentially transformative effects of discourse is quite as 'proper' a topic for 'higher' study as is the setting of puritan tracts in the discursive formations of the seventeenth century. On other occasions what might prove more useful will not be the criticism or enjoyment of other people's discourse but the production of one's own. . . . You may want to stage your own signifying practices to enrich, combat, modify or transform the effects which others' practices produce.<sup>16</sup>*

In the end Hartley, Goulden and O'Sullivan seem to be as shackled by the Academy as the fuddy-duddies they imagine themselves opposing. They seem to be unaware of the fact that English, like any other institution, has its reactionary and progressive contestations; that English is confronting the issues that they too are confronting, and in addition it has to confront, because of its historical formation, the questions of aesthetics and production that they are happy to ignore.

Even further beneath their notice is the transformation of attitudes to print media that is

going on in primary schools and may yet prove to have more radical potential for media education generally than either English or Sociology at secondary level and above. *Making Sense* . . . never asks the fundamental questions 'what does a reader do?', 'what is literacy?' which, writ large, amount to 'what is media education for?' It is here that the study of all systems of signification, for which they are, rightly, calling, might conceivably begin; but it is also here that children's production of their own meanings cannot be relegated, as it is in *Making Sense* . . . , to a mere adjunct of theory.

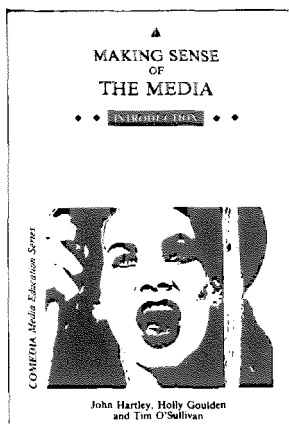
The most hopeful thing that can be said about *Making Sense* . . . is that, as befits its size, weight and price, it may function as a tombstone, a marker on the end of an era. The era in which a single academic discipline seeks to lay exclusive claim to Media Studies is ready for burial; unfortunately, a few jaundiced reviews won't be enough to bury it.

I've heard it said – in fact I'd better come clean and say I heard it said in SEFT's office – that 'the theory was all done in the '70s – all we have to do now is work out how to teach it.' Naive or not, that notion is around at a commonsense level: the sense of there being an established canon of media theory. But what we also did in the '70s was to jettison theories we never thought we'd have to rework. Aesthetics was elitist; production merely creative; pedagogy took care of itself. In fact, these never really had the status of theories anyway: part of the politics of that period was precisely to discard 'atheoretical' notions that were being used to justify a contempt for politics and for history. But just because we may have been right then, does not mean that aesthetics, production and pedagogy will never be needed, cannot be theorised. If we really want to make sense of the media, we need these theories too.

<sup>16</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1983, p 212.

The *English Magazine* no 16, May 1986, includes a section on simulations, listing all the packs available. It is sold by the ILEA English Centre, Sutherland Street, London SW1.

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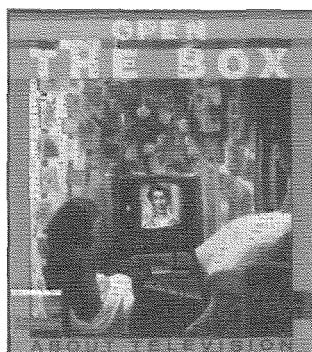
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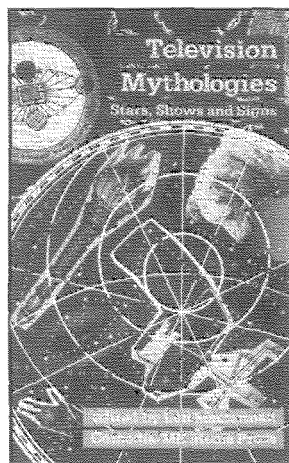
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# THE SUBJECT OF PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE AMERICAN ACADEMY

REFLECTIONS ON US HIGHER  
EDUCATION BY JAN ZITA GROVER

FORMAL EDUCATION IN PHOTOGRAPHY in the United States today offers students instructions on how to produce photographs, to value them; it reinforces students' desire to devote part of their professional and/or personal lives to making, exhibiting, or consuming them. Yet in doing so, virtually none of the hundreds of undergraduate and scores of graduate programmes in which students can major in photography systematically addresses the *uses* and various social relations to which already-existing photographs, much less the ones currently being produced by students, are put. How can this be?

The most fruitful speculations on this subject focus upon the parallels between the ways the school constructs something called *Photography* as a unitary subject and the ways that people—in this case, students—are themselves socially constructed as unitary subjects.

Let's begin with practices: at a typical undergraduate arts college or in a typical Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) programme at a large US state university, students must take a 'core curriculum', two courses of which are art history courses, two of which are photographic history, and six of which are two- and three-dimensional design courses. With the exception of one or two semester (fifteen week) or quarter (ten-week) long mandated history courses and the occasional option of a criticism course, then, students are offered no other courses in which photographs are considered as social (as opposed to individual, 'creative') constructions. For that matter, if one takes as a premise that history-as-taught does not

generally differ too much in approach from the texts that accompany it, we can anticipate that the current approaches of US photographic history courses are conservative and largely art historical (based on the preponderance of two texts in use, Beaumont Newhall's *The History of Photography* and Naomi Rosenblum's *A World History of Photography*, and the dozens of syllabi I have examined in the past four years). In such courses, photographs are considered largely in relation to their maker and his (I use the adjective deliberately) biography; stars are proposed and simultaneously confirmed as parts of various traditions<sup>1</sup>; and a sort of woozy connoisseurship, employing the vocabulary of the ineffable (*intuitive, original, creative, spontaneous, genius, universal, beautiful*, etc) further reduces consideration of the photographs to the single plane of image-as-self-expression.

The rest of a student's courses are in technique or genre. In the former, the emphasis is upon acquiring practical skills: students learn to operate the view camera, set up and use commercial studio lighting, expose and print colour-negative or colour-positive film, employ specialised black-and-white printing techniques. They may also work on perfecting a street-photographer's technique, an architectural photographer's technique, nineteenth-century processes.

Such coursework is by no means neutral. Technology is invariably preceded and informed by values: here, in addition to acquiring certain photographic techniques, students are expected to acquire skills in pre-

<sup>1</sup> Probably the most egregious example of this is Jonathan Green's *American Photography: a Critical History 1945 to the Present*, whose heuristic conceit is that modern US photography, like Thebes, has seven heroes from whom what is most vital in our Tradition flows. Not surprisingly, all seven heroes, as well as virtually all of their descendants, are white men.

photography, serious undertone. The first powerful news photographs of this time became the striking public visual sites of the decade. These photographs include the early image from the American Popular film of John Kennedy's assassination of November 1963. But Jackson's picture of Ruby, shot and changed, made one day after the assassination, photographs made in Vietnam in 1969 for *Rollis*. Dan and McCullin, Larry Burrows, and three Las Vegas photographs of civil rights marches and violent demonstrations in 1968. The Cuban Missile Crisis, James Kaghan, Bill Klemm and Edward Lyon, the Belgian government's official picture of the dead Life magazine, made public in October 1967. John K. Adams' photographs of the Vietnam War, including a famous picture of a soldier, John K. Adams, and Bill Klemm's photograph of the Vietnam War, 1967.

These images represented the public, social life of the decade. But they were also the beginning of the decade's most important photographs. The first was the photograph of the Vietnam War, 1967. The second was the photograph of the Vietnam War, 1967. The third was the photograph of the Vietnam War, 1967. The fourth was the photograph of the Vietnam War, 1967. The fifth was the photograph of the Vietnam War, 1967. The sixth was the photograph of the Vietnam War, 1967. The seventh was the photograph of the Vietnam War, 1967. The eighth was the photograph of the Vietnam War, 1967. The ninth was the photograph of the Vietnam War, 1967. The tenth was the photograph of the Vietnam War, 1967. The eleventh was the photograph of the Vietnam War, 1967. The twelfth was the photograph of the Vietnam War, 1967. The thirteenth was the photograph of the Vietnam War, 1967. The fourteenth was the photograph of the Vietnam War, 1967. The fifteenth was the photograph of the Vietnam War, 1967. 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1963. Ruby, shot and changed, made one day after the assassination.



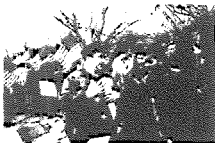
1969. Dan and McCullin, Larry Burrows, and three Las Vegas photographs of civil rights marches and violent demonstrations in 1968.

They were also the beginning of the decade's most important photographs.

The exceptional, beautiful, concerned photographs of the Vietnam War, 1967. The second was the photograph of the Vietnam War, 1967. The third was the photograph of the Vietnam War, 1967. The fourth was the photograph of the Vietnam War, 1967. The fifth was the photograph of the Vietnam War, 1967. The sixth was the photograph of the Vietnam War, 1967. The seventh was the photograph of the Vietnam War, 1967. The eighth was the photograph of the Vietnam War, 1967. The ninth was the photograph of the Vietnam War, 1967. The tenth was the photograph of the Vietnam War, 1967. The eleventh was the photograph of the Vietnam War, 1967. The twelfth was the photograph of the Vietnam War, 1967. The thirteenth was the photograph of the Vietnam War, 1967. The fourteenth was the photograph of the Vietnam War, 1967. The fifteenth was the photograph of the Vietnam War, 1967. The sixteenth was the photograph of the Vietnam War, 1967. The seventeenth was the photograph of the Vietnam War, 1967. 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1967. John K. Adams' photographs of the Vietnam War, including a famous picture of a soldier.



1967. John K. Adams' photographs of the Vietnam War, including a famous picture of a soldier.

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<sup>2</sup> e.g., Columbia College Chicago's recent exhibitions of Helmut Newton and Louise Dahl-Wolf.

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senting their work according to certain conventions. Less useable skills than legitimating signs, these conventions emphasise photography as a modernist art practice and are 'readable' chiefly through the discourse of the museum. They emphasise images as universal (isolated from the texts with which photographs are invariably encountered elsewhere in life), precious (over-matted, Nielsen-framed), authorised (the sole texts carry the maker's *name*). Students are expected to show their work spotted, mounted and/or over-matted in final critiques. That such presentations presuppose an entire host of values (high art, museum/gallery audience, photograph-as-precious-object, etc) greatly at odds with how photographs are commonly received as well as possibly the students' own intentions for the work is ignored. If challenged, the practice is instead proposed as *a tradition*, as if traditions were themselves value-free.

The opportunities for students to display their work within the college are also commonly limited to the museum-esque: glass cases in the classroom or darkroom area and a once-a-year student show stress the importance, indeed the singularity, of the art gallery as desirable venue for photographic work. For those colleges with the resources to mount travelling or self-produced exhibitions, these values are reinforced by wall-exhibitions where even the most egregiously commercial magazine and advertising work is recuperated for *art* behind Nielsen frames and white museum mats<sup>2</sup>. Significantly, such exhibitions are not accompanied by analyses of the advertising/publishing institutions and practices giving rise to such photographs or to the relationships between advertising as one capitalist enterprise and the US college as another. (In practice, college programmes, whether in photography or the other so-called 'communications arts', function as nurseries for the very practices extolled on the gallery walls; those of us who teach within the system are frequently adjured by administrators to remember that we are not only moulding *creators* but *consumers* – 'the people who will appreciate and collect photographs if they don't make them themselves'.) The photographs are instead presented in a manner that bleeds them of information about their originating contexts and re-contextualises them in a way that foregrounds their formal qualities.

If there are alternatives to the museum and its *haute* capitalism for producing and circulating work, the US college programme does not commonly acknowledge them to its students: their presence remains implicit and the programme's posture *vis-à-vis* the exhibition and valuation of photographs remains a monolithic one.

After approximately four years spent mastering a variety of photographic practices, the student graduates, now able to make polished 'professional' prints. But of what? For what reasons? Here we come more openly to the matter of *values*, for along with teaching students technical practices, the photography department also teaches students to value certain things about their identity as photographers, about the relationship of their own practice to the world's need or desire for photographs, about the truth-value of photographs.

Values are imparted principally through the carrot-and-stick of critiques and grades. Most weeks during the term, students present work in classes and instructors and/or other students critique that work. What assumptions underly those critiques? What kinds of relationships are established under the authority of the instructor between the students' prints and the world that will receive them? What are the criteria for 'good' grades in such classes?

In my experience<sup>3</sup>, what is most valued and most discussed is that which is most measurable—technical proficiency. Take as a specific instance the programme in which I most recently taught: as its prospectus spells out, one of its aims is to teach students to make something called *the classical print*. As the term suggests, this is a category at once historical and metaphysical. To term a photographic print *classical* is to recall a moment in art photographic practice—namely, the 1920s–30s in the United States—when photographic modernists took what they saw as the peculiarly photographic properties of an exposure-and-printing system and began producing images that insisted upon what, for want of a better word, we could describe as their *photographicity*: endlessly deep focus, an almost hallucinatory attention to surface texture and detail, an emphasis upon homely or everyday subject-matter, use of large-format equipment (at a time when commercial applications of photography were increasingly employing portable cameras and enlargements), black-and-white negative and positive materials, and cold-tone commercial papers, which were waxed or ferrotyped to give them a high, machine finish. Responding to ideas coming out of revolutionary German and Soviet practices and the theories of Stieglitz, these American photographers emphasised formal structuring devices with highly insistent presence; indeed, their images, taken along with the texts generated around them, appear to be precisely *about* how formal devices construct an image—a deliberate refusal of conventional meaning in favour of plays of light and shadow, line and contour, deliberate effacement of identifiable 'subject-matter', and so forth.

Those who proposed this (at the time) radical departure in photographic production—e.g. Ansel Adams, Edward Weston, Brett Weston—are the godfathers of the photography programme in which I have learned and taught. At the same time that their work is implicitly acknowledged as historical by the use of that term, 'classical', they are nonetheless made the metaphysical Law for all subsequent practices. What students are first taught to produce in many US programmes are photographs whose technique and values are the direct but now ahistorical descendents of Weston's and Adams'. When such a pedagogical premise is challenged, it is commonly defended by analogy with the far older practice of expository writing classes: 'Before a student can *get creative* with his writing, he needs to know how to write correctly/grammatically.' That photographs for newspaper or billboard reproduction, for commercial portraiture or a variety of other uses have very different standards than those intended for museum exhibition is regularly ignored—yet another evidence of the singular if frequently unenunciated museum

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<sup>3</sup> I write as a veteran student and instructor of both studio and history courses at undergraduate and graduate levels, in public junior colleges, state universities, and a private four-year arts college.

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model for photographic production in US academic programmes. The fact that the 'classical' print was itself an historical response to a contemporary crisis in the arts is entirely ignored in this scenario. It has come instead to occupy a privileged status as a universal and hence unquestionable construct: *what serious photography is*.

Thus we find it entirely possible for a classroom critique, indeed an entire semester's worth of classroom critiques, to go by without any substantial interrogation of the students' or 'masters' images save at the level of their approach to standards of technique and formal competency. Sexually-oppressive images, socially-exploitative images are regularly produced, presented, and found praiseworthy or wanting solely on the basis of their technical strengths as classical prints, with all that that term has come to imply. Thus we may find, as I did several semesters ago, that a woman student can have reached the end of her third (penultimate) year in a collegiate programme in photography without have had the sexual implications of nude or bondage photographs brought up in any of her classrooms; that she can have reached the end of that year without seeing more than a handful of photographs made by women presented and/or discussed in class by her instructors:

*In [our] photography program [she wrote], you are taught to think about form, structure, and interesting compositions, and study how others have already used these, yet you are never encouraged to really think for yourself nor form opinions about the contents of the work you view. You are shown and told work that is good (rarely are good images challenged as to why they are so good, never are the images evaluated in terms of bad) and so in our naiveté, we accept these opinions without question. Good work is evaluated by its notoriety or by an individual's success, by ingenuity or technique, but rarely if ever are students asked to consider a photographer's viewpoint or intentions when evaluating a photograph or body of work....<sup>4</sup>*

Such an evaluation accords well with academic practices and values that emphasise the anomic, individual production and reception of images: the photographic artist 'creating' out of some deep, inchoate urge (which is thus rendered unaccountable in social terms); the viewer responding in a gallery setting as if to a koan—puzzling out the embedded, supposedly fixed 'meaning' of the work as it hangs behind glass on a wall, so as to gain access to the artist's distinctively individual vision. (Yet if pressed for an image's 'meaning', most instructors and students will fall back onto the contradictory ploy of claiming the image's ineffability.)

But is there such a thing as individual production or reception of images—a unitary subject producing or viewing a photograph? Even if we return to the theories and practices of the high-modernist masters—those makers of classical prints who are the models for a traditional photography programme—we would have to say *No*. Artistic production is more a historical response to an era's important cultural questions than it is an individual enterprise; as Raymond Williams has put it, we *are more spoken for* by our culture than we *speak* it. It is no coincidence,

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<sup>4</sup> See my 'Putting Feminism in the Classroom', *Exposure* Summer 1985, vol 23 no 2, for a lengthier consideration of this issue and this student's experience.

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then, that there are such close parallels between the practices and values of, for example, the Westons, Ansel Adams, Imogen Cunningham, and Willard Van Dyke: bound together by their experiences of photographic art/commercial institutions and practices in the late 1920s-early 1930s in Northern California, they developed certain aesthetic and regional self-definitions as practitioners. Under close scrutiny, they look less like the singular subjects of modernist art mythology than they do the interactive subjects of a highly particular history—as is indeed borne out by their collective efforts to redefine photographic art practices in the Bay Area through their short-lived group, f.64.

We must look more closely at the notion, so dear to photography programmes, that what we are doing is encouraging something called *individual talent, individual creativity*. For clearly such terms are themselves cultural and thus historical constructions—and ones, I would submit, that need to be examined and challenged rather than left implicit.

We can begin by asking ourselves what functions are served by encouraging students to think of their photographic practices and values as products of individuality rather than enculturation. We have seen that what students are taught is a system of practices and values that is narrow, insistent, and reductive—not the product of individuality but rather of a powerful cultural institution's collective values and practices. This system professes allegiance to *genius, originality, mastery*—values that would seem to be at odds with the social systematisation that gives rise to them. This contradiction is regularly ignored.

Such a paradox signals the eruption of an uncontainable contradiction in the academic institution and the larger culture of which it is a part. Simon Watney, more tellingly than anyone I know, has described the cultural lie at the heart of academic programmes in photography.

*... a critical discourse of excellence, creativity, and originality is ceaselessly projected across the field of technical competence, providing the student with a highly sophisticated sense of what is 'appropriate' to different situations, as if this stemmed from his or her 'self' as opposed to the complex mediation of market forces, which inform the photographer's work at every stage in the production of a photograph, from the choice of camera, film-stock, and printing procedures through to the actual selection of subjects, accompanying texts, and so on. Such choices are however understood as signs of immanent 'talent' rather than the result of contingent knowledge.<sup>5</sup>*

There are obvious advantages to the institution in promoting such a view of photographic knowledge/talent. Proficiency in learning a view camera's swings and tilts, a film's effective exposure index, etc, is discrete and measurable: it is relatively easy for faculty to propose and win student acceptance of such 'objective' standards of technical competency. *Everybody feels good: we all know what we're here to learn and the criteria for success are clear.*

Yet on closer examination such standards are anything but objective and clear. Who decides that these technical competencies constitute any sort of effective measurement of a student's understanding of photo-

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<sup>5</sup> Simon Watney, 'Photography – Education – Theory', *Screen* January-February 1984, vol 25, no 1, p 68.

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<sup>6</sup> A telling example of the importance attributed to the material basis of photographic education is the Society for Photographic Education's *Graduate Education in Photography in the United States*, a 1985 service publication purporting to 'survey graduate education in photography... as a result of the many questions the society has received over the years from students and their advisors regarding graduate schools and programs.' This booklet schematically describes facilities, faculty, and admissions policies, yet nowhere mentions costs. In the US, where with the exception of some publicly-supported junior colleges, all tertiary institutions charge tuition, such costs would seem to be the first thing 'students and their advisors' might be expected to wonder about.

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<sup>7</sup> In Chicago, where I recently taught, students in commercial classes photographed tabletop set-ups of china, glassware and silverware. Those with credit cards frequently charged their props at fashionable department stores, then returned the purchases for credit later. No such appealing accessories were available to poor students, whose set-ups were thus less likely to look 'professional' for reasons that had nothing to do with lighting or focus, and everything to do with credit.

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graphic production? Who decides that such technical skills are an effective foundation for producing or reading photographs as cultural signs? Signs for *whom*? Wherein lies the objectivity? And what kinds of differences does such objectivity pave over – such as differences in *economies*, where some students do not learn to print *classically* because they cannot purchase box after box of paper and film, while others can? Or differences in *gender*, where certain 'techniques', such as street or nude photography, pose problems to some women and gay men not used to occupying public space assertively or to acting upon the female body as an object of desire? And who benefits from the imposition of these measures of practice, these *objective* criteria?

Certainly the faculty do: classical technique offers them seemingly universal criteria on which to judge student performance and elide all troublesome differences. Certainly in the short run the students do, too. For by encouraging them to think of technique as *an-end-in-itself* rather than a *means-to-an-end*, as Watney has pointed out, the system allows both student and instructor to mark progress and achieve tangible goals. Acquisition of technique is more measurable than acquisition of understanding and a hell of a lot less controversial. It reinforces the notion, so dear to our twentieth-century American hearts, that progress is indeed upon and among us, and it is a concept of success or talent that is heavily reinforced by the photographic media, where each issue of *Popular Photography*, *Modern Photography*, *American Photographer* endlessly touts the seductions of equipment and technique.

Again, however, the seeming equation of technique and 'talent' proves to have a basis in what is left unexpressed in the photographic classroom – differences in class, gender, race.<sup>6</sup> Direct confrontation with the naked facts of difference – i.e., that some students have more and more-sophisticated equipment, more money for paper and film, more access to ideas at large in the culture, more access to *credit*, remain unexpressed save as aspects of their *technique*.<sup>7</sup>

Here again, the way(s) the student is constituted as a social subject have been effaced in a discussion of technique; whether she or he makes witty, kitschy, elegant, or graceless images is not seen as a matter of where the student stands *vis-à-vis* dominant culture, but whether or not she or he is 'up to standard', a standard its cashiers do not define as in any way class-, gender-, race-, or time-bound.

Once we venture beyond applying technique as criterion of success or talent, we fall squarely into the realm of cultural values, and here all is contingent and ambiguous. Accordingly, this area is given a very wide berth save for recourse to the old familiar narrative of the master (the old familiar Master Narrative). Students are not encouraged to discuss *why*, for what purpose, someone may have made a particular photograph – only *how*. Questions of how photographs may have functioned for their contemporary viewers (indeed, the imagination is strained to realise that photographs *ever had* any other mode of viewing than their present, museumised existence), or what other factors beside technique and individual genius may have had a role to play in their production or

circulation, are regularly ignored or dismissed as specimens of intentional fallacy (it is no coincidence that *haute* practitioners of photographic criticism/history return more frequently to the tenets of New Criticism than to any critical approaches developed since).

Individual genius is the favoured heuristic device for exploring images once the pleasures of technique have been exhausted. How or why the techniques that have been so burningly discussed in beginning and advanced technical courses were applied by The Masters can be referred to his knowledge/genius/intuition, a convenient tautology that reinforces the romantic idea of art—and artists'—ineffability. Narratives are constructed around each instructor's choice of Golden Oldies—Stieglitz's equivalents, Weston's sky/palms/naked ladies, Ansel Adams circa 1934—so as to constitute patrilineal descents, aesthetic genealogies. That such lineages are largely constructed on the basis of visual similarities does not appear to bother these historicisers, nor do other thorny historical questions such as the varying natures of influence, the roles of institutions, the constitution of audiences, sub-cultural versus dominant cultural 'readings', etc. The point is merely to increase one's own pleasure and sense of legitimacy, not to understand better what (if any) connections there may have been among a group of image-makers. It is a form of critical pissing-in-the-soup to point out that retroactive traditions—i.e., sifting the past for legitimating anchors to contemporary practice, such as Ansel Adams and Beaumont Newhall have proposed—are inadequate models for explaining historical change in photographic arguments. In practice, the tyranny of isomorphism, both formal and technical, reigns supreme in master narrative-making. Thus an exhibition of landscape photographs from the mid-nineteenth through the late twentieth century is mounted as if it is self-explanatory: *of course* the photographs mean the same thing, can be assessed on the same grounds, do the same kinds of cultural work now as then; they *look* alike, technically (large-format, monochromatic contact prints) and formally.

That photographs are made and exist only, in John Tagg's words, within 'the diversity of sites [that is] the social formation itself: the specific historical spaces for representation and practice which it constitutes'<sup>8</sup>, is a notion foreign to most US photography classrooms, where images, like the subject Photography, are constituted as metaphysical, outside of time and place, existing only to be ceaselessly and everywhere enjoyed.

Let me take this a step further and point out the worlds that open beneath that much- and casually-used term, *Photography*. This word, like its analogue, *Mankind*, elides more than it reveals: it obscures differences that lie at the heart of why and how photographs are produced, circulated, looked at and responded to. In programmes like the ones I have taught in, Photography is taken to mean a variety of things, but many crucial distinctions are lost or obliterated, thrown into the endlessly capacious hamper of that term's vagueness. Photography can refer, variously, to the final *product*—the photograph; to the ways the photograph is *circulated*; to the places in which the photograph is *seen* (e.g., the Inter-

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<sup>8</sup> John Tagg, 'The Burden of Representation: Photography and the Growth of the State,' *Ten* 8 no 14, 1984, p 11.

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national Museum of Photography); to the materials used in *producing* the photograph; to the *techniques* used in producing the photograph. More commonly, the term is used with a promiscuous vagueness that proposes all of these as a unified field.

Like the way that photographs are critiqued and presented in US academic programmes, the use of this phrase constructs a metaphysics – a timeless, universal series of relations and practices untroubled by *difference*, whether of the maker's class, race, sex, nationality, religion, politics, or all the other thousands of factors through which we constitute/are constituted as social selves and our products as cultural artifacts – their functions, institutional status(es), etc.

Conceived of in this way, where can a student in Photography find spaces to accommodate her or his work? What, after acquiring the much-fetishised skills of shooting, exposing, developing, printing, is she or he to do with these 'talents'? In the field of academic Photography as constituted as a series of technical and formal obstacles or challenges to be overcome or met, what does the student do once she or he has achieved those objectives? After all, you can only make so many technically and formally 'perfect' portraits, street photographs, formal studies of light and shadow before the fact becomes clear that 'progress' has ceased. And there are only so many gallery or museum spaces in which you can (possibly) show those images.<sup>9</sup>

Whether students aspire to be the next Brett Weston or the next Cindy Sherman, the academy's insistence upon Photography as a technical and meta-historical subject ignores what seems most basic to photographs considered anywhere beyond this impossibly hothouse atmosphere: their positioning as elements within historically-specifiable discursive practices. This is one of the reasons why so-called postmodernist work like Levine's, Haacke's, Christy Rupp's, travels so poorly, 'reads' so opaquely outside the historical transection of time and place for which it was created: as critiques of specific historical institutions and practices, such work cannot be expected to resonate fully outside their respective discursive grounds. Those trained to believe that Great Photographs somehow transcend the limitations of time and place – those trained, in other words, to believe that such a valuation is itself above time and space – will dismiss such work for its very modesty in admitting its historical mutability, topicality.

There will obviously always be room (whatever that means) inside cultural institutions for practitioners whose understanding of their field is a primarily technical or formal one. And if students find sufficient challenges in the endless looping of technique to keep them going, that's fine, too. What concerns me is that so little acknowledgement is made of the limitations of this as a position – so little acknowledgement of whom such definitions serve.

Several years ago, the Society for Photographic Education conducted a survey of Master of Fine Arts degree holders which revealed that five years post-MFA (that darkly-named *terminal degree*), more than half of these graduates were no longer regularly making photographs. Indeed,

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<sup>9</sup> Moreover, in the newer US galleries it becomes troublingly clear that photographically-derived images are being exhibited which do not conform to the standards that students have been taught at so painful a cost. Reaction to such work – e.g. Cindy Sherman, Sherrie Levine, Sarah Charlesworth – is often one of nervous disavowal: *this isn't Photography, this is a joke*. See Abigail Solomon-Godeau, 'Winning the Game When the Rules Have Been Changed: Art Photography and Postmodernism', *Screen*, November–December 1985, vol 25 no 6, pp 88–102.

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in the various histories one can concoct of photographic practices, there are a great many instances of short bursts of activity followed by abandonment of the camera as a tool for *saying whatever it was that the camera-wielder wanted to say*. Now, obviously there could be a great many reasons for this. But I think we must ask ourselves whether the enormous stress put upon acquiring photographic technique to the virtual exclusion of any consideration of photographers' and photographs' roles within a wide variety of cultural discourses and institutions (e.g. the sciences, law enforcement, medicine, media, sexual identity, politics, the museum, social welfare, etc) does not cheat students of opportunities to think of themselves as producers and active consumers/transformers of images that play vital parts in culture. We need to study not only those photographs that can be positioned as the traces of their makers' authorship (the practice upon which the entire edifice of the art-photography academy and market has been reared), but also those images authored *by the culture*—that is, advertising and newspaper photographs, press agency photographs, photographs in historical archives and other 'authorless' collections. This means, among other things, addressing photographs as continuous with the world, rather than as an escape from it; addressing the ideological components of image-making and reading, rather than believing that photographs/photography are *above* or *beyond* ideology (what we Americans would call Politics); addressing photographs as *material objects*—as having a basis in the material circumstances of their makers rather than merely in the imagination of a Creative Genius.

It is true that colleges and universities in the US have a far larger and more heavily-subsidised system for producing academically-trained photographers than those in the UK.<sup>10</sup> It does not follow, however, that all is well in the land of plenty. In its traditional American disdain for theory and love of practice, the American academy has produced a generation of photographers and historians neck-deep in commitment to the importance of artisanal technique and avowedly uninterested in theory. But as Victor Burgin has pointed out, denial of theory does not mean that one operates without it<sup>11</sup>; it simply means that theory remains implicit.

The hostility with which much explicitly theorised photographic imagery and criticism is met within the US academy is depressing testimony to our system's anti-intellectualism. By the same token, the support given by American academic, museum, and publication programmes to avowedly non-theorised work reveals a theoretical armature every bit as pervasive—a widespread consensus about photography as a pre-eminently formal and technical episteme; but one less susceptible to direct challenge and evaluation because not acknowledged as in any way contingent.

I cannot foresee radical changes in the ways photographic image-making/reading gets taught in US colleges and universities unless a great deal else changes in those institutions. This is unlikely to happen: our academies are pre-eminently instruments of socialisation and encultur-

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<sup>10</sup> See Simon Watney 'Crisis Course', *Ten.8* no 21, 1986.

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<sup>11</sup> Victor Burgin, 'Something about Photographic Theory', *Screen* January-February 1984, vol 25 no 1, pp 61-66.

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<sup>12</sup> Institutional pockets of resistance to these dichotomisations and neutralisations, such as the photography programmes at the University of California/San Diego and the California Institute of the Arts are very few in number, as are outlets for circulating work that challenges conventional practices.

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<sup>13</sup> The phrase *finish fetish* comes from the

California car culture of the 1950s-60s and was applied by Peter Plagens in his 1974 book on contemporary California art, *The Sunshine Muse*, to the obsession with finish that characterised much California painting and sculpture of the same period. The *finish fetish* displaces anxiety about content and status onto the level of style in much the same way that American practicality is an acceptable replacement for evasion of the implications of/for action (in other words, theory).

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ation, producing meanings and practices attuned to the demands of a capitalist service economy. Unless the economy itself changes, there is little likelihood that the university will change itself. 'Photography' is presently taught as a support to, a microcosm of, our economy—both of them making sharp distinctions between professionals and amateurs, artists and technicians (while basing the former's talent on the latter's), artists and scientists, artists and workers; bleeding potentially troublesome social content out of both production and consumption, suppressing difference in favour of what Kodak calls *the universal language of photography*—a collective rite practiced by isolated individuals.<sup>12</sup> Pedagogical challenges to academic business-as-usual are not likely to arise with any consistency, much less support, within institutions supported by the powers-that-be. What we who have taught or continue to teach within such institutions can do is to help our students see the contradictions and rationales in institutional practices; return ourselves stubbornly and ceaselessly to the time-boundedness and locality of our work and theirs; recognise the *finish fetish*<sup>13</sup> of so much academic photographicising as the masked terror of difference, or mortality, that it is.

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# CANVASSING SCREEN

BY SIMON WATNEY

More nonsense has probably been talked and written concerning *Screen* than any other contemporary British cultural journal. While its actual intellectual trajectory has never been entirely coherent, the energy with which certain debates have been developed and sustained through its pages has guaranteed a certain demonology in its critical reputation. The centrality and significance of these debates has meant that for at least the last fifteen years it has had as many violent detractors as enthusiastic advocates.

What is clear is that *Screen* was largely responsible for launching the project of a semiotically and psychoanalytically informed film studies in Britain. Emphasis has constantly shifted between the institutions of cultural production, and the conditions of reception, with a tradition of close textual analysis sandwiched between them in such a way – until recently – as to arrest the question of how to theorise the relation between them. Under the editorship of Sam Rhodie and then Ben Brewster *Screen* shifted attention away from auteurism and traditional sociology<sup>1</sup> in the direction of the consideration of narrative, identification, genre theory, sexuality and so on, posed in terms which inevitably trespassed beyond the territory of their ostensible object – film.

In other words *Screen* has consistently raised difficult questions about representation as such and, as such, has had a major impact on contingent areas of cultural production including writing, television, photography and journalism. Under the editorship of Mark Nash it also launched out explicitly in the direction of art history and art historical methodology. This shift was signified clearly in T J Clark's 1980 article on Manet's *Olympia*<sup>2</sup>, and more clearly still in Peter Wollen's response<sup>3</sup>. In this context it is

significant that when the editors of the recent Open University Modernism unit came to compile their course reader they included Clark's piece but not Wollen's, which was not even referenced<sup>4</sup>. This decision is closely related to the local situation obtaining in British art history, where debates with the dominant scholarly tradition have been largely confined to a specific and self-defining 'alternative' tradition of Marxist sociology – in an historical line descending from the work of Francis Klingender and Frederick Antal to Clark himself and others such as Charles Harrison and Fred Orton – more or less inflected by arguments from feminism and elsewhere, which nonetheless refuse both semiotics and psychoanalysis (though Clark's case is more complex) as theoretical tools.

As a 1980 *Screen* Editorial pointed out, 'Peter Wollen contests Clark's notion of the relation of the textual to the political. Wollen argues that if we are concerned with the production of a sexual subject in a particular social formation, then in considering Manet's *Olympia*, for instance, we should be concerned with the production of "woman" as fetish within a particular conjuncture of capitalism and patriarchy. Fetishism, Wollen argues, enables a coherent account of the contradictory readings which Manet's painting appears to offer and in the face of which Clark proposes an effectively Realist

<sup>1</sup> See Andrew Higson, 'Critical Theory and "British Cinema"', *Screen* July-October 1983, vol 24 nos 4-5, pp 80-95.

<sup>2</sup> Timothy J Clark, 'Preliminaries to a Possible Treatment of Olympia in 1865', *Screen* Spring 1980, vol 21 no 1, pp 18-41.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Wollen, 'Manet – Modernism and Avant-Garde', *Screen* Summer 1980, vol 21 no 2, pp 15-25.

<sup>4</sup> See Simon Watney, 'Modernist Studies: the Class of '83', *Art History* vol 7 no 1, 1984.

*politique*—that painting should provide a recognisable image drawn from the world of class struggle and class relations.<sup>5</sup> What is at stake here is both the currency of taken-for-granted terms such as ‘man’/‘woman’, and the relation between politics and representation, institutions and discursive formations. The unreconstructed realist aesthetic of much of what passes as the ‘new’ art history merely reverses the procedures of the ‘old’ art history according to the dictates of its overt political alignments. The study of Manet’s technique is replaced by a reading of Manet as a condensor of class conflict.

It is in its challenge to realist aesthetics and vulgar humanism embodied in crude reflection and/or expression theories of cultural practice, that *Screen* remains as relevant as ever to debates concerning the fine art traditions in First World painting and its history—a history which is part of the larger context of representational strategies deployed throughout the capillary system of power relations at work in the domain of the social. Since its merger with *Screen Education* in 1982, *Screen* has increasingly investigated questions of identity, both on the part of cultural producers and of audiences actively (if unconsciously) negotiating the various codes through which they are addressed as ideal spectators<sup>6</sup>. This question of identification—of how we are able to project ourselves into the ideological space of films, television and photography—has not been carried over into art history, perhaps because the ‘new’ art history can only operate fixed, external notions of class and gender in relation to potential audiences for painting. The ‘new’ art history is also caught in a difficult theoretical trap insofar as it tends to think of images in terms of absolute truth/falsity distinctions, against a model of ‘true’ or ‘false’ consciousness. Its Marxism is remarkably old.<sup>7</sup>

Many of these issues are pushed into focus by a recently published collection of essays entitled *The New Art History*<sup>8</sup>. In their Introduction the editors note that this appellation offers ‘a capacious and convenient title that sums up the impact of feminist, marxist, structuralist, psychoanalytic, and sociopolitical ideas on a discipline notorious for its conservative taste in art and its orthodoxy in research’<sup>9</sup>. However, as John Tagg succinctly observes in the same volume, ‘perhaps we have seen the formula “marxism-feminism-psychoanalysis” too often to

wonder at what it presumes. What strikes me is that it is the hyphens which do all the work. It may be adequate shorthand for a range of challenges within art history or for the components of a wider debate with which art history has at last been brought into contact. But its repetition has hidden tensions and incompatibilities and has implied too easily that different theoretical traditions can be not only reconciled but combined.’<sup>10</sup> Quite so. The same Introduction also acknowledges the impact of *Screen* on the ‘new radical intelligentsia’ in the Britain of the ‘70s, ‘promoting the little-known ideas of the Russian formalists and the Brecht-Benjamin circle, by introducing semiotics from Saussure to Barthes, and by discussing the post-Freudian psychoanalysis of Lacan’. The editors state that ‘by stressing that theorising was itself a kind of practice which could fundamentally revise the way knowledge was used in society, *Screen* showed that a marxist intelligentsia could come in out of the cold and enjoy respect in the academic world.’ But the most radical implication of all this furious theoretical practice seems to have amounted to little more than a decision no longer to capitalise the term ‘marxism’. The trouble is that no position is ever taken up and followed through. We are supposed to applaud the arrival of a social history of art which ‘tends to see any claim that art has a special language of its own as a smokescreen for the deeper social reality that supports it’ and which is ‘able to regard works of art as illustrations of sexual oppression, class war, imperialism or the ruling ideas of a particular age’ while at the same time welcoming ‘the new theory, which defines art as one of the major fictions in the grand fiction of western metaphysics’. The strain of alternating bows and scrapes towards Marx and then Foucault and

<sup>5</sup> Mark Nash, ‘Editorial’, *Screen* Summer 1980, vol 21 no 2, p 9.

<sup>6</sup> See Annette Kuhn, ‘Women’s Genres’, *Screen* January-February 1984, vol 25 no 1, pp 18-28.

<sup>7</sup> See Simon Watney, *op cit*.

<sup>8</sup> A L Rees and F Borzello (eds), *The New Art History*, London, Camden Press, 1986.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid*, pp 2-10.

<sup>10</sup> John Tagg, ‘Art History and Difference’, in *The New Art History*, *op cit*, p 166.



As a collection then, *The New Art History* is, to put it kindly, heterogeneous. In a regrettably short paper Dawn Ades cites J-B Pontalis approvingly on Surrealism's ability 'to have maintained a series of contradictions *without* resolution'<sup>11</sup>, which is as near as anybody comes to thinking seriously about the question of subjectivity, except in the familiar humanistic rhetoric through which Tom GRETTON claims that 'the fundamental way in which "art" is an ideologically operative category is that it both reinforces and disguises our sense of alienation, our sense that to be in charge of our destinies is inappropriate'<sup>12</sup>. This is a bizarre inversion of Marcuse's aesthetics, which have dropped entirely out of sight for the 'new' art historians. So apparently has the intellectual history of our *discipline*, a word which like Marcia Poynton in this collection I am happy to use. The principal victim of this forgetting is Sir Ernst Gombrich, whose work is as caricatured here as it is in the criticism of Norman Bryson<sup>13</sup>. Indeed, one might think from these papers that Gombrich had died after the publication of *Art and Illusion* in 1960. It is particularly unhelpful of Stephen Bann to trivialise Gombrich's intellectual history while praising the work of Svetlana Alpers and Michael Baxandall, which—important as it is—remains almost unthinkable outside the discursive framework of Gombrich's long career. But perhaps the other 'new' art historians haven't been able to get hold of a copy of *Symbolic Images*<sup>14</sup>?

The great strength of Gombrich's work lies in his ability to move across a wide territory of subject areas on the basis of a methodology which is clearly set out, if in a state of internal tension between the claims of a universalising psychology of perception which neatly evacuates the social from the field of the aesthetic, and a complex psychoanalytically informed historical semiotics which lets it back in again. In this latter respect his work is clearly marked by the intellectual influences of Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz, both of whom worked in this country as refugees from fascism, Kurz remaining in London at the Warburg Institute until his death in 1975. It is quite incomprehensible to me that the 'new' art history offers itself today without any acknowledgement of their work, which offers by far the most vivid example of how

psychoanalysis may be articulated across the social history of art<sup>15</sup>.

*The New Art History* is nonetheless peppered with insights, ranging from the difficulties of teaching A-level art history in schools, to Margaret Iversen's not unrelated observation that 'the very fact that the whole history of writing on art, from Alberti to Gombrich, has sought to demonstrate the intellectual, abstractive procedures necessary for the production of an image, indicates that it is written against the background of a deep-seated prejudice within western philosophy that iconic images are too close to their objects to have the character of thought and language'.<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately the weakest essay in the book concerns feminism, art history and cultural politics. It is precisely from feminist debates concerning visual pleasure, sexual identity, and the mobility of identifications we take up in relation to images that art history has much to learn—debates which do not seem to have attracted its writer's attention. Thus, with few exceptions, the 'new' art history is sensitive to politics only as an area *outside* signification, defined almost exclusively in terms of class and gender. It is uniformly taken for granted that all artists and audiences are heterosexual, though there are occasional nods towards non-anthropological analyses of Third World cultures from Dawn Ades and Charles Harrison.

*The New Art History* seems to me to confuse two areas of concern: on one hand there is a frequently expressed anxiety about the very objects of art historical study, and on the other, as Charles Harrison puts it, 'a critique not of the objects themselves, but of the terms in which they have been represented'<sup>17</sup>. Harrison's

<sup>11</sup> Dawn Ades, 'Reviewing Art History', in *The New Art History*, op cit, p 18.

<sup>12</sup> Tom GRETTON, 'New Lamps for Old', in *The New Art History*, op cit, p 65-66.

<sup>13</sup> See Norman Bryson, *Vision and Painting*, London, Macmillan, 1983.

<sup>14</sup> E H Gombrich, *Symbolic Images*, Phaidon, 1972.

<sup>15</sup> See Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz, *Legend, Myth and Magic in the Image of the Artist*, (1934), Yale, 1979. Also Ernst Kris, *Psychoanalytic Explorations in Art*, International Universities Press, 1952.

<sup>16</sup> Margaret Iversen, 'Saussure v. Peirce: Models for Semiotics of Visual Art', in *The New Art History*, op cit, p 85.

project, which would involve a methodological inquiry into the basic organising categories which underpin his profession, is not helped by the tendency of many of his colleagues to apologise for studying the work of Poussin or Titian or Brancusi in the first place. This is presumably a legacy of a certain kind of political commitment, clearly spelled out in the Introduction, which tends to harness paintings to the narrow function of didactic political illustrations. An analysis of the ways in which the category 'art' constantly invites a privileging of the aesthetic over and above all other types of social meanings surely need not result in a wholesale denial of the dimension of aesthetic responses. Yet this unfortunately is precisely what the 'new' art history seems to encourage, which inevitably prompts the puzzled question of why we should be bothered with painting at all, if its own historians regard it as no more than a froth of false consciousness? Of course we need to be able to account for and explain the effects of the proximity of the art market on both the production and reception of paintings, but this need not present any more of a problem in relation to painting than it does to writing or acting or film-making. That is, if painting is understood as a range of practices ranging from colour-by-number kits available at Woolworth's to national state collecting policies. The identity of a Sunday painter is no less subject to contingent discursive and institutional regulations than that of a Royal Academician. What matters is that we should be able to understand the hierarchical organisation of different categories of painting according to criteria which are every bit as rigid as the old academic genre system which separated out different areas of subject matter in a vertical alignment of ascending values, from landscape at the bottom to 'history painting' at the top.

In this context concrete questions need to be raised concerning, for example, the ways in which the idea of an artist's 'personality' are established, and then traced back through his or

her career – the criteria upon which pictures are dismissed as 'minor' or 'unresolved' or 'out of character', in a manner which unconsciously protects and reinforces a narrow set of ideas governing notions of artistic identity and pictorial values. We are living through a period which is actively deconstructing the nineteenth century opposition between fine art and 'mass' and 'popular' cultures. As John Tagg has written elsewhere, 'the materiality of discursive practices, the impossibility of referring them back to some primal anterior reality, and the impossibility of abstracting experience from the discursive structures which articulate it, disrupt any simple notion of the determinations of discourses by a sociality of which they are, in any case, a part'<sup>18</sup>. To place an interpretive embargo on the canonical fine art tradition as such, because of its contingency to the art market and the institutions of official collective memory, would be as absurd as to place an embargo on Hollywood films because of their mode of production and the taint of cultural imperialism. What is needed is an art history which can put its chosen objects to unauthorised use, making them speak against the very iconicising and atemporalising discourses which they are generally employed to serve. As Victor Burgin writes in a new introduction to an article first published in *Screen*, the 'new' art history seems 'content simply to fill in the previously empty social space around the inherited "masterpiece" with a glut of detail purporting to establish its "determinations" in the (mainly economic) class relations of which art in general is seen as the more or less "mediated" expression. In short, the unswerving positivism of the new art history renders it as incapable as was the idealism of the "old" of examining the modes of constitution of its putative objects *within* its own discourses, and from the positions (institutional, national, racial, sexual, etc.) from which these discourses are spoken'.<sup>19</sup> The last thing we need right now is a criticism which can merely accuse Boucher, for example, of 'sexism', in a discourse which merely inverts the atemporalising strategies of the very institutions which it ostensibly seeks to subvert.

<sup>17</sup> Charles Harrison, 'Taste and Tendency', in *The New Art History*, op cit, p 77.

<sup>18</sup> John Tagg, 'Postmodernism and the Born-Again Avant-Garde', *Block* no 11, 1986, p7.

<sup>19</sup> Victor Burgin, 'Something about Photography Theory', in *The New Art History*, op cit, p 42.

This article is based on a talk given at the Annual General Meeting of the Association of Art Historians, Brighton, April 5, 1986.

# PROGRESSIVE PEDAGOGY AND POLITICAL STRUGGLE

VALERIE WALKERDINE LOOKS BACK AT  
AN EDUCATION FANTASY

An idealist dream, an impossible fiction or something to hope and struggle for? I would like to explore some of the problems and possibilities for and with progressivism as a pedagogic mode and political strategy. I shall tend to make reference to primary school pedagogy because that's what I'm most familiar with, but I hope that these remarks will be relevant to all sections of the education system and to our own practice as teachers in higher and further education.

In 1968 I became a primary school teacher. I was swayed by the romantic promise of progressivism in education, and I linked poverty and inner-city decay with the terrible regimentation and the 'old-fashioned' repressive and silencing methods. I had read Herbert Kohl's *Thirty Six Children*<sup>1</sup> and John Holt's *How Children Fail*<sup>2</sup>, and I loved my inner-city children with a fierce passion. For under my nurturance their illiteracy would be converted into inner-city poetry. There was joy in my classroom. There were also terrible problems: how to control the children, for example. And four o'clock found me frequently sobbing quietly at my desk, behind the shut door where none of the old, strict teachers, who didn't like my ways, could see me.

Clearly, difficult as it all was, the dream of something different was at that moment very important. But since then the libertarianism upon which the progressivism of the '60s was founded has been re-examined. It is this libertarianism which was crucial in locating the 'personal' as a central aspect of the political and particularly to developing a whole panoply of

therapeutic interventions. However, alongside a concept of liberation as personal freeing was an understanding of power which located it a fixed possession, in this case that of the oppressive, and consequently repressive, teacher. Personal liberty became synonymous with the lifting of that repression.

In response to these ideas I want to offer two arguments: first, that the concepts of power and liberation are intimately connected to the radical bourgeois project, the formation of the modern state and the modern concept of democratic government. I shall argue that the forms of pedagogy necessary to the maintenance of order, the regulation of populations, demand a self-regulating individual and a notion of freedom as freedom from overt control. Yet such a notion of freedom is a sham.

Secondly, the position of women as teachers (particularly in primary schools) is vital to the notion of freeing and liberation implied in such a pedagogy. It is love which will win the day and it is the benevolent gaze of the teacher which will secure freedom from a cruel authority (in the family as well as the school). Through the figure of the maternal teacher the harsh power of the authoritarian father will be converted into the soft benevolence of the bourgeois mother. Hence, I will argue, aspects of women's sexuality

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<sup>1</sup> Herbert Kohl, *Thirty Six Children*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1971.

<sup>2</sup> John Holt, *How Children Fail*, Harmondsworth, Pelican, 1969.

# PROGRESSIVE PEDAGOGY AND POLITICAL STRUGGLE

VALERIE WALKERDINE LOOKS BACK AT  
AN EDUCATION FANTASY

An idealist dream, an impossible fiction or something to hope and struggle for? I would like to explore some of the problems and possibilities for and with progressivism as a pedagogic mode and political strategy. I shall tend to make reference to primary school pedagogy because that's what I'm most familiar with, but I hope that these remarks will be relevant to all sections of the education system and to our own practice as teachers in higher and further education.

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<sup>1</sup> Herbert Kohl, *Thirty Six Children*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1971.

<sup>2</sup> John Holt, *How Children Fail*, Harmondsworth, Pelican, 1969.

are intimately bound up with the concept of progressivism. Just as women have argued that the sexual liberation of the '60s was a celebration of masculine sexuality, so I shall argue that the liberation of children conceived in these terms did not mean the liberation of women. In some ways, it actually served to keep women firmly entrenched as vital carers. Women teachers became caught, trapped inside a concept of nurturance which held them responsible for the freeing of each little individual and therefore for the management of an idealist dream, an impossible fiction.

Critical to my analysis is a questioning of the concept of power employed in previous formulations. I want to suggest that instead of constructing a concept of power = authoritarianism and absence of power = helpful teacher, democratic relations, such formulations deny power. (I shall return to the concept of denial used in its psychonanalytic sense.) Instead, I shall use power in the Foucauldian sense of *power/knowledge*<sup>3</sup>. It is in this sense that I want to raise problems for the concept of liberation as freedom from coercion and to suggest that it is central to the concept of the bourgeois individual.

The transformation of governmental form, and therefore of the notion of power, is located by Foucault as the shift from an overt sovereign power to a 'suspicious' and invisible power located within those aspects of the sciences (particularly human sciences) which came to be used as the basis for what he calls technologies and apparatuses of social regulation. Basically, Foucault argues that the form of government depends not on authoritarianism but on normalisation, the concept of a calculated, known population. In that sense a variety of governing practices – from medicine through law, to social welfare and schooling – began to be based on a concept of a norm, a normal individual.

In the nineteenth century science was used to calculate and produce a knowledge of the population on an unprecedented scale. The production of 'knowledges' became intimately bound up with the devising of new techniques of population management. The school was the arena for the development of one set of techniques for 'disciplining' the population. The emergence of popular and then compulsory schooling related specifically to the problems of

crime and poverty understood as characteristics of the population: criminality and pauperism<sup>4</sup>. Schooling was seen as one way to ensure the development of 'good habits' which would therefore alleviate these twin problems. The original strategy was to engage children in ceaseless activity with constant surveillance to ensure these habits. Subsequently, this strategy was abandoned in the face of children's ability at rote learning, 'to recite the Lord's prayer for a half-penny', without actually assuming the right moral habits.

It was at this point that the kind of pedagogy which had been advocated in terms of overt authority began to be challenged. There were many examples of such challenges, from the work of Froebel and Pestalozzi to Robert Owen and his school in the New Lanark Mills to Itard and Seguin in France (who Maria Montessori followed)<sup>5</sup>. In their differing ways they began to advocate an education 'according to nature'.

Here 'nature' was defined in a number of ways, but most of those which are important in the inception of psychology involve a sense of 'species-being' derived from evolutionary biology. Thus, in these cases, 'education according to nature' came to mean according to a science of human nature. The critical features here were a sense of evolution and heredity, and an environment understood in quasi-biological terms. Their 'interaction' varied in different theories, but was rarely stated differently.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Michel Foucault uses the couple *power/knowledge* to examine the positive effectivity of knowledge of populations in the possibility of government. For a general treatment see Colin Gordon (ed), *Power/Knowledge*, Brighton, Harvester, 1984. For a specific treatment in relation to primary school pedagogy see Valerie Walkerdine: 'Developmental Psychology and the Child-Centred Pedagogy' in Henriques et al (eds), *Changing the Subject: Psychology, Social Regulation and Subjectivity*, London, Methuen, 1984.

<sup>4</sup> See Karen Jones and Kevin Williamson, 'The Birth of the Schoolroom', *Ideology and Consciousness* no 6, 1979.

<sup>5</sup> See Valerie Walkerdine, op cit, and Carolyn Steedman, 'Prisonhouses', *Feminist Review*, 18, 1985 for more detail. While the former were attempts in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Montessori followed up by applying the techniques used to train and test the humanity of the 'wild boy of Aveyron' to the education of 'idiots' and then to the poor of the Italian city slums in 1910-20.

<sup>6</sup> A rare difference was the work of the Soviet psychologist, Lev Vygotsky, working in the 1920s and '30s. Although he did not deviate from a 'developmental' model, he made a concerted effort to situate that development within history and not just phylogeny.

This human nature was mapped out in the Child Study Societies which flooded the land. The calculation of the distinct qualities and characteristics of children followed many attempts to link ontogeny to phylogeny – the individual's development to that of the species – the most famous of which is Darwin's study of his infant son<sup>7</sup>. This classification of children proceeded in the same way that the animal/human distinction was being monitored in the Empire. The categorisation of children according to the ontogenetic characteristics of their natures was similarly based on certain assumptions about the civilising process and the place of 'a natural environment' in it.<sup>8</sup>

Education according to nature became the way of ensuring a natural path of development, the best kind of civilising process<sup>9</sup>. Theories of instincts and animality were thus connected to the regulation of the population, many of whom (particularly the urban proletariat) displayed all too obvious signs of animal passions<sup>10</sup>. Degeneracy was seen as an aberration of nature.<sup>11</sup> And the part played by the environment was made clear by the mapping of the city – the spread of typhoid, its criminal quarters, and so forth. The environment too could be watched, monitored and transformed.

I am glossing over a great deal of political struggle, but my aim is to demonstrate that the advent of naturalism, that is, the ensuring of a correct passage from animal infant to civilised adult, became understood both as 'progressive' (according to scientific principles) and effective. It would prevent the threatened rebellion *precisely because* children who were not coerced would not need to rebel – the lessons would be learned and this time properly. Docile bodies would become a self-disciplined work force.

What was proposed was a process – a scientific process – whereby the schoolroom could become a laboratory, where development could be watched, monitored and set along the right path. There was therefore no need for lessons, no discipline of the overt kind. Power became that of the possessor of the Word, of rationality, of scientific concepts – reason's mastery over the emotions. This would ensure a stable populace and rebellion would therefore be eradicated by natural means. Interference was limited and surveillance was everywhere. The ultimate irony is that the child supposedly freed by this process

to develop according to its nature was the most classified, catalogued, watched and monitored in history. Freed from coercion, the child was much more subtly regulated into normality.

These new concepts created 'the child' as the object of calculation and pedagogic practice. For example, 'language' became that standard presented in reading books created especially for the child. Using concepts derived from Etienne Balibar's examination of the French language<sup>12</sup>, Jacqueline Rose argues<sup>13</sup> that the construction of a unified nation required the production of reading material for children. What we now think of as 'natural language' was produced specifically as a special text stripped of the literary style of the educated aristocracy of the time. In that sense uniformity (natural language) was created out of diversity – a wide variety of dialects, for example – and made the object of those texts used in compulsory schooling. In this way a standard – an educated standard – was produced, with the consequent pathologisation of difference as deviance from that standard. (In a similar vein, Keith Hoskin<sup>14</sup> traces the way in which the development of silent reading transformed a system of oral recitation, and particularly facilitated the development of examinations as written work in silence, thus making the mass testing and normalisation of the population

<sup>7</sup> Charles Darwin, 'A Biographical Sketch of an Infant' (1840), reprinted in *Mind* 7.

<sup>8</sup> The take-up of 'Social Darwinism' had widespread effects, and the emerging anthropology sought to map the animal/human distinction onto nature in different environments in the 'discovered' lands of the Empire. Here was a ready test of the 'civilising process'.

<sup>9</sup> Because it worked *with* nature and not against it it became a pedagogy of development. Thus the regulation of the population could become self-regulation of a natural system, operating according to universal laws of development. See, for example, Nikolas Rose, *Social Regulation and the Psychology of the Individual*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985 and Denise Riley, *War in the Nursery*, London, Virago, 1983.

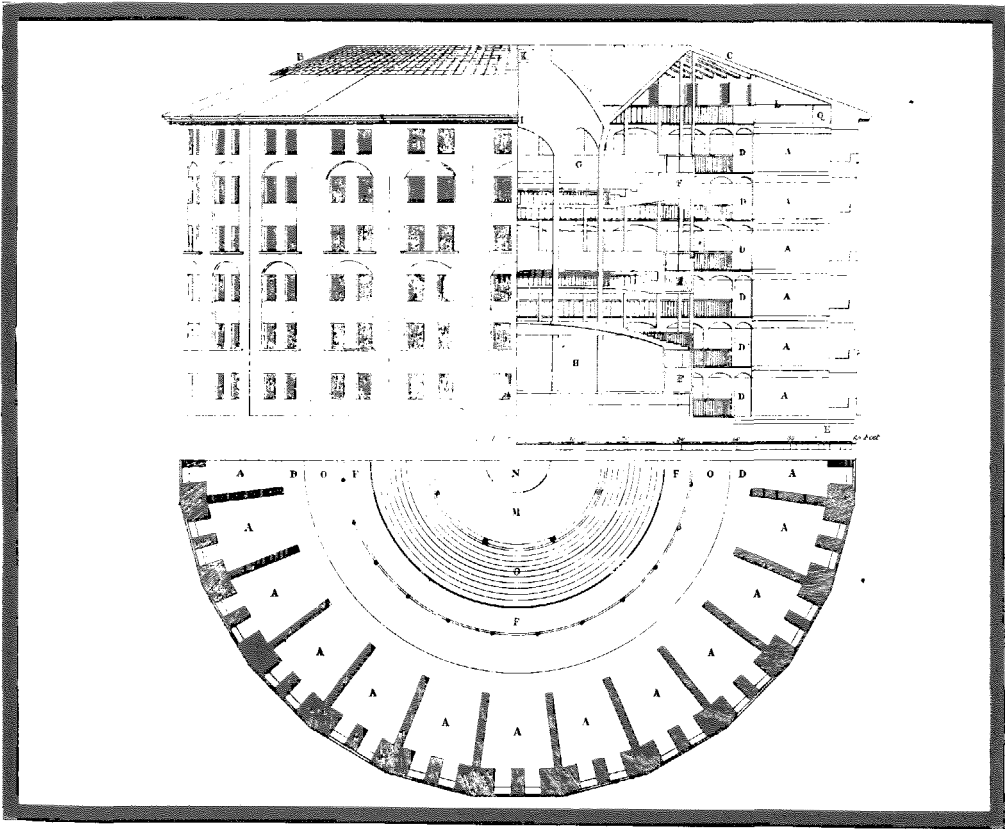
<sup>10</sup> The feared uprising of the urban proletariat was associated with the violence of 'animal' or 'pre-human' emotions.

<sup>11</sup> Nikolas Rose, op cit.

<sup>12</sup> Renée Balibar and D Laporte, *Le français national*, Paris, Hachette.

<sup>13</sup> Jacqueline Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan or the Impossibility of Children's Fiction*, London, Macmillan, 1985.

<sup>14</sup> Keith Hoskin, *Cobwebs to Catch Flies: Writing (and) the Child*, (unpublished manuscript) University of Warwick, Department of Education, 1985.



The power of surveillance: plan for a prison panopticon from Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*.

possible.)

At the very moment that nature was introduced into pedagogy, the shift to covert surveillance became enshrined in a word – ‘love’. ‘Love’ was to facilitate the development of the child in a proper supportive environment. This shift is co-terminous with, and related to, another, that is, the entry of women into elementary school teaching. The emerging human sciences, building upon previous philosophical tenets, had deemed women’s bodies as unfit for reason, for intellectual activity. The possession of a womb was thought to render a woman unfit for deep thought, which might tax her reproductive powers or make her less amenable to rearing children. Given the state of Empire, the concern with the race as with the species, it was considered potentially injurious to allow bourgeois women to reason.

Nevertheless, women’s struggles to enter

higher education finally were successful – when elementary teacher training was opened to them. Frances Widdowson argues that the development of teacher training colleges went together with the concern to educate women.<sup>15</sup> Such a concern was not a reversal of the brain/womb polarity but precisely its opposite. Women were to be educated, in the words of the 1933 Hadow Report<sup>16</sup>, to ‘amplify their capacities for maternal nurturance’. These capacities, while given naturally, could be enhanced so that women teachers could provide a quasi-maternal nurturance to compensate for the depraved environments of the poor. In addition, women

<sup>15</sup> Frances Widdowson, *Going up to the Next Class: Women in Elementary Teacher Training*, London, WRRRC/Hutchinson, 1983.

<sup>16</sup> Consultative Committee of the Board of Education, *Infant and Nursery Schools* (Hadow Report) 1933, London, HMSO.

58 could watch, monitor and map the child's development. Clipboard in hand, these scientific educators could survey each of their small charges, whose development was entrusted to their love.

It was always an impossible fiction. The dream of ensuring each child's pathway to reason turned the schoolroom, where pupils recited their lessons and moved up the form, into the classroom<sup>17</sup>, a place in which each child was considered separately. Discipline became not overt disciplining but covert watching. Regurgitated facts became acquired concepts. Knowledge became naturalised as structure or process. Teachers began to talk about 'learning *how* to learn', the surest guarantor of correct rationality. The old ways had to be outlawed to make room for natural reason. Children therefore weren't taught facts but left alone to interact with their environment. No more would there be the horror of child labour. Classroom work was replaced by play – the *proper* medium of expression for children, the most basic and animal-like medium of unconscious fantasies and the recapitulated development of the species.<sup>18</sup> The classroom became the facilitating space for each individual, under the watchful and total gaze of the teacher, who was held responsible for the development of each individual. This assumed a total gaze, which could be stated, as one teacher put it, as 'knowing each child as an individual'. An impossible fiction.

### **The Psychic Economy of the Progressive Classroom**

Let us imagine such a classroom. All has been transformed to make way for 'active learning', not 'passive regurgitating'. This pedagogic space is filled with groups of tables, not rows of desks. There may be no playtime, since work and play are indistinguishable, and work cards and individual assignments may have replaced text books. Children may choose their own time-tables. Freedom is imagined. A whole fictional space is created, a fantasy-space in which the ideal nature, the most facilitating environment (rather like a greenhouse) is created in the classroom. Away from the decay of the inner city, the air in the classroom smells sweet. The teacher is no authoritarian father figure, but a bourgeois and nurturant mother. Here all can

grow properly. In this greenhouse there will be no totalitarianism. It is the nursery and it nurtures, preventing the pent-up aggression leading to delinquency and war and fascism. The freedom of children is suggested by teachers who are not the oedipal father, but the pre-oedipal mother, whose attachment to the children in her care, together with her total presence, ensures their psychic health.

The desire for happiness is a sentiment echoed throughout such classrooms (and deftly caught in Pát Holland's film *What are Schools For?*, where the children are only allowed happy sentiments and happy words: 'Wonderful, beautiful', coos the teacher). There is a denial of pain, of oppression (all of which seems to have been left outside the classroom door). There is also a denial of power, as though the helpful teacher didn't wield any (and indeed we progressivists of the '60s believed we could be friends with children, be partners in learning – no power, no hierarchy, called by our first names).

The teacher is there to help, to enable, to facilitate. Only those children with a poor grasp of reality, those poor pathological children, see her power. Because of their own authoritarian families, they react in a paranoid fashion to this nurturance – they are aggressive, they do not speak. They feel they are being watched, not being nurtured.<sup>19</sup> Who, one might ask, has not adapted to reality? A bourgeois reality where it is impossible to see the power invested in your charitable needs, where the poor and oppressed are transformed into the pathological and inadequate.

But more than this, the happy classroom is a place where passion is transformed into the safety of reason. Here independence and autonomy are fostered through the presence of the quasi-mother. There is no severance of this

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<sup>17</sup> David Hamilton, *On Simultaneous Instruction and the Early Evolution of Class Teaching*, University of Glasgow, Department of Education, 1981.

<sup>18</sup> Ideas about play spanned work from child psychologists (Klein) to work on animal ethology demonstrating that young animals played, making it therefore natural.

<sup>19</sup> This idea is further elaborated in Valerie Walkerdine, 'On the Regulation of Speaking and Silence', in Carolyn Steedman, Cathy Urwin and Valerie Walkerdine (eds), *Language, Gender and Childhood*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985.



mother-child dyad except to autonomy.<sup>20</sup> This leaves the child in a fantasy of omnipotent control over the Other—the teacher. ‘His’ path to rationality, displayed best in mathematics, is a path to omnipotent mastery over a calculable universe (outside time and space—a rationally ordered and controlled world<sup>21</sup>). Passion is superseded by an ‘attraction to ideas’, the ‘love of the order and purity of mathematics’. Such power is immensely pleasurable. But whose universe is real?

Is it the universe outside time and space where there will be no war, no pain, no desire, no oppression?

At what cost the fantasy of liberation? I suggest that the cost is borne by the teacher, like the mother. She is passive to the child’s active, she works to his play. She is the servant of the omnipotent child, whose needs she must meet at all times. Carolyn Steedman<sup>22</sup> suggests that such a role mirrors not the aristocratic mother, but the paid servant of the aristocracy, who is always there to service the children. His majesty the baby becomes his highness the child. The price of autonomy is woman. The price of intellectual labour (the symbolic play of the Logos) is its Other and opposite, work. Manual labour makes intellectual play possible. The servicing labour of women makes the child, the natural child, possible.

The education of working class and black children is something of a problem, since they conform rarely to the ideal child. So too, the girl: is she to be a knower or a potential nurturer of knowers? What price her freedom? Although there is much to say about the education of girls and women, let me simply state that regulation of women’s sexuality, rendering them fit only for maternal nurturance is something which, as scholars like Lucy Bland have demonstrated<sup>23</sup>, pathologises activity and passion. Needs replace desire. Affect replaces libido. Indeed in progressivism girls are often held up as lacking: they seem to demonstrate either deviant activity or a passivity which means that they must be found lacking in reason and compensated for this lack. As I tried to show in ‘Sex, Power and Pedagogy’<sup>24</sup>, it is masculine sexuality, to the point of violence, which is validated by this pedagogy. It is the female teacher who is to contain this irrationality and to transform it into reason, where it can do no harm—a

transformation which turns physical violence into the symbolic violence of mastery, the law. And in each case, the woman as container soaks up and contains the irrationality which she best understands.

The extent of validation of violence among boys is shocking in classrooms today. And the downplaying of this aggression in reasoned argument is itself an interesting transformation of power. Here it is the knower who can win and apparently topple the power of the teacher, through argument. Disciplining becomes knowing.

Although some have suggested that progressivism frees working class children from harsh authoritarianism, I would suggest precisely the opposite. Progressivism makes the product of oppression, powerlessness, invisible. It is rendered invisible because within the naturalised discourse it is rendered ‘unnatural’, ‘abnormal’, ‘pathological’—a state to be corrected, because it threatens the psychic health of the social body. It is therefore very important to reassert the centrality of oppression and its transformation into a pathology in terms of a political analysis of the present social order. For example, what working class mothers say to their children is either counted as nothing (it doesn’t count as natural language in the deprivation literature) or is romanticised and fetishised as the working class culture of *Nippers* reading books, bingo and chips, the colourful banter of cockney market-traders. Even in the ‘equal but different’ model of working class language displayed (differently) in the work of William Labov and Harold

<sup>20</sup> In this discourse, separation from the Mother/Other is not to anywhere or to a relation to the father/phallic/paternal space but to an autonomy conceived as ‘individuation’.

<sup>21</sup> This is further developed in Valerie Walkerdine, *The Mastery of Reason*, vols 1 and 2, London, Methuen, forthcoming.

<sup>22</sup> Carolyn Steedman, ‘The Mother Made Conscious’, *History Workshop Journal*, 1985.

<sup>23</sup> Lucy Bland, ‘Guardians of the Race or Vampires upon the Nation’s Health? Female Sexuality and its Regulation in Early Twentieth Century Britain’, in E Whitelegg et al (eds), *The Changing Experience of Women*, Oxford, Martin Robertson, 1986.

<sup>24</sup> Valerie Walkerdine, ‘Sex, Power and Pedagogy’, *Screen Education* no 38, 1981, pp 14–25.

60 Rosen, for example<sup>25</sup>, the historical *production* of the 'natural' is completely elided. As Jacqueline Rose argues in *The Case of Peter Pan*, 'there is no natural language, especially for children'. Yet within the progressivists' nurturant welfare state, with its inadequate families aided by our latter day charity, bourgeois culture is taken as nature.

Meanwhile, meanings are struggled over in the classroom. 'The Child' is created as a sign, to be read and calibrated within the pedagogic discourses regulating the classroom. The child is defined and mapped in its relations of similarity and difference with other signs: activity,

experience, play rather than passivity, recitation, work and so forth. Through the regulation of this pedagogy children become subjected in the classroom.<sup>26</sup> The classroom then is a site of struggle, not of an unproblematic fitting of these categories onto children but of a constantly erupting pathology, like the unconscious, breaking the smooth surface of the pedagogic discourse.

Many studies, of which the most famous is ORACLE<sup>27</sup>, have claimed that progressivism has never been tried in Britain, that most British classrooms are not child-centred, despite the orthodoxy. We are faced with children working, following the rules, trying to find out what to do. This despite the fact that there are taken to be no rules, only the pure joy of discovery. It often seems that the teachers produce the very categories that children are taken to be discovering. Children are bewildered because they don't know the rules, use strategies which aren't supposed to exist. Teachers turn out to be more traditional than expected and feel guilty because the future and 'freedom of our children forever' is laid at their door. They are the guardians of an impossible dream, reason's dream of democratic harmony.

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<sup>25</sup> William Labov, 'The Logic of Non-Standard English', in Ashar Cashdan (ed) *Language in Education*, Open University and Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972. For Harold Rosen's critique of Bernstein, see his *Language and Class*, Bristol, Falling Wall Press, 1972, and *The Language and Class Workshop* series.

<sup>26</sup> For further elaboration see Valerie Walkerdine, *The Mastery of Reason*, forthcoming, op cit.

<sup>27</sup> ORACLE, Observational Research and Classroom Learning Evaluation, was written up as a series of books, for example, Maurice Galton, Brian Simon and Paul Croll, *Inside the Primary Classroom*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983.

## The Oxford Literary Review

# SEXUAL DIFFERENCE

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# INDEPENDENT MEDIA AND MEDIA EDUCATION

SUGGESTIONS FOR CONNECTIONS BY  
GILLIAN SWANSON



The Children's Film Unit on location with *Mr Skeeter*.

Despite many attempts to integrate independent film into education and its use in some areas of higher education, adult and community education as well as in informal educational contexts, it has historically been seen as an unsuitable constituent of Media Studies in schools and colleges of further education. Now, when far more alternative media are being used in secondary and further education, it is initiatives in video production that have gained most ground. Even so, the use of alternative

media generally appears to be uneven and sporadic, little has been written and no teaching materials (as far as I am aware) have been developed. In short, this is an untheorised area with a diffused history and enjoying little *organised* strategic impulse. While from a political perspective, a project of transformation may take in both the production of alternative media and a practice of teaching, there are few practical opportunities and little evidence of a widespread commitment to both areas.

I would like to examine some of the problems involved in founding contacts between the independent sector and teachers in formal education, to consider why we might argue for the teaching of alternative media in film and media studies and suggest some ways of approaching how to teach with independent work. What criteria can we as teachers employ, what strategies can we adopt to make a productive use of this work rather than offering it as something unusual, an idiosyncrasy?

Some of the limitations of finding points of overlap between independent production and teaching are specific to the two areas themselves. In teaching, for example (I speak from my own experience in further education), they are inhibited by three constraints. First, the confines of subject areas have impeded what could be useful areas of intervention outside courses in Film and Media Studies *per se*. General Studies courses incorporate teaching of 'social issues' and the nature of social institutions, information and systems and forms of communication. These could be linked to notions of representation, images of society and its power structures, how 'information' is made sense of and the nature of communication as a process. To consider alternative forms of representation and different images would form part of an oppositional teaching strategy within this area. But many General Studies teachers will only take on alternative work if it is useful in teaching *something else* – they wish to teach *through* rather than teach *about*. Audio-visual work is required to be 'functional' and this approach sees no reason to use film that is understood as saying something in a more difficult way. The myth of 'direct' communication still persists.

The second limitation is brought about by the confines of syllabuses. In Film Studies 'O' Level, for instance, the first two sections of the course, genre and authorship, give little space to approach independent media. The third, industry, concentrates on film as commodity and even there radical differences in forms of production are ignored in the definition of independence as those films produced and distributed outside of the major companies and the system of distribution 'ties' and cinema chains. The only point at which one can incorporate alternative work is in the optional final section, incorporating, among others,

women and film, politics and film and, now, images of race. It does, of course, mean that those who are convinced about the value of teaching about stardom (another of the options) must choose between this and such others, while notions of genre and authorship remain protected (and protective). It also means that any alternative work shown at this stage is set against the hierarchy of dominant forms reinforced by prioritising such critical approaches and industrial models, so that one is hard put to make sense of them as anything but 'other'.

Probably the most troubling barrier to generating interest in alternative media is what people see as the resistance of students. There is a popular assumption that students will reject this work because they will not 'like' it. This often derives from an underestimation of the students and sometimes, in my view, an overestimation of teachers' abilities to predict their students' reactions. I will return to this in more detail, because if changes are to be made so that conditions are not so unfavourable to the teaching of alternative work, then the momentum has to come from a change in teachers' attitudes. For the time being, we might just ask *why* students may react against these forms. (Perhaps the possibility of formulating such a question in itself justifies teaching about such work.)

To turn to the independent sector, how is the lack of overlap perpetuated here? Formal experimentation in film has traditionally been fostered in the art school context, where a knowledge of and belief in the value (and often autonomy) of artistic practices often presents a rather introverted discourse. Even if this is not the case, film teachers in this sector may not have encountered notions of pedagogy (the process by which teaching and learning takes place) as they have probably not undergone teacher training and such questions are not central to film-making in this area. Independent film and video-makers generally teach practical work rather than Film or Media Studies. Where independent work is used in teaching about the media, it is taught for the most part in higher education as Film Studies (very few Media Studies courses exist in higher education), because of the more academic formal and theoretical emphasis of the writings in this area.

Finally, the labour-intensiveness of

64 independent production makes it largely incompatible with 'formal education'. You can't teach if you are continually planning, making or distributing your films, although part-time work is a possibility for some. Again, this usually means higher education will be the most welcoming, and that the first commitment lies outside teaching.

The 'professionalisation' of many independent workers over the last three or four years, the establishment of enfranchised workshops and the financial impetus towards producing not only 'art cinema' (from the British Film Institute) but also 'good television' (from Channel 4) has contributed to a breakdown of integrated practice, the former association of independent work with educational usage (as have educational cuts, leading to a greater use of video recording and a contraction of film bookings, particularly of expensive independent work). This has diverted many independent workers even further away from teachers and teaching, to define themselves and their work in relation to the industry. This division between the educational and independent film and video sectors means that teachers fail to acknowledge an area that incorporates similar concerns in relation to the media as their own teaching, while the independent sector continues to produce work which addresses audiences outside the educational context and continually ignores this important constituency.

So how is it possible to ally the concerns of the two areas and to produce a complementary definition of their activities? Whereas these points attempt to describe the historical division between film-making and teaching, this is changing. Some groups working on film/video are taking on questions familiar to teachers in collaborations with young people (*Framed Youth, Giro, MsTaken Identity*). The concerns of such work are issues of pedagogy – the way the media represent knowledge to us and the way we are able to make sense and meaning from them. Teachers have much to say about film and video-making for a younger audience and how they can be used in teaching, and they have a related responsibility to use this work in schools and colleges.

One of the results of the current division between education and independent production is that writings on the latter construct a discourse

that asks the readers to assess work as *activists* involved in reformulating media language and constructing new systems of representation, or as *critics*, giving a reading of a work, or analysing its formal processes. What is missing is the connection between the work of audiences (how we make sense of and respond to the address of film/video) and how we can build on this as teachers, asking students to look at how these products relate to the codes and conventions we are used to, how we respond and work at the meanings differently, how we take up the position offered to us, what challenges this makes to our understanding of conventional structures of meaning.

Experimental cinema frequently invites evaluation on the basis of how 'radical' it may be formally, how far it disrupts the codes and conventions of dominant cinema, particularly narrative structures and continuity editing. This approach may finally reject narrative forms altogether, as necessarily disguising their own ordering, fixing us in positions of submissiveness, presenting itself as 'truth' and 'reality'. In a practice that rejects narrative as a shaping force, the issues at stake are those of 'materials' and 'process', 'structure' and 'form'. It is possible to remain committed to this scrutiny of the means of construction and, at the same time, to feel the pressure of other ideological questions (which is not to say that they are always regarded separately). To make these connections is to retain the oppositionality of an experimental project, to resist its appropriation into the institutionally defined category of 'art' (as useless, decorative, removed from 'reality', imbued with aestheticism – rather than self-consciously scrutinising, repositioning subjectivity, reshaping perceptions).

A political approach which emphasises narrative and character construction might condemn such 'formalism', but both nevertheless see meaning as emanating from the text. A *third* approach has argued that the *position from which* a text is constructed should be considered, and that the spectator's position is pivotal both in the way s/he is addressed and in the way her/his construction as a social subject contributes to meaning. And this implies questioning aspects wider than film or video itself, including the processes by which social identity is organised.

As a teacher, I want to consider not just the

correctness or progressiveness of the formal operations or subject matter of the texts themselves, but *who* they are speaking to, what choices audiences are offered in the work *they* do on the text and how they are addressed so that their own social attitudes and experiences are called upon and challenged. Rather than imposing a pre-determined set of aesthetic criteria I want to discuss what kind of questions independent film or video raise about notions of representation in the way they disturb or exploit forms and systems of address and also about the issues, situations, experiences they use as their material. This would be a way of constructing a politics of education that can be argued *in the same movement* as a politics of representation, one that would understand a notion of experimentation as *always* based on questions of representation.

This would also enable a critical perspective that incorporated work made by groups of young people (such as those from Birmingham Film and Video Workshop or distributed by Albany Video) which teachers are beginning to use in media studies because they speak from positions many students may recognise as their own. It would provide critics and teachers with a common approach to representation that formulates its criteria in direct relation to where the work speaks from, who it is for, what it is trying to do and what it is asking us or allowing us to do.

Meanwhile, of course, many teachers still resist using independent work, whether of this kind or that made by more experienced film-makers. Even if they show work made by young people, they do not see it as a serious or challenging object of study comparable to film or television productions drawn from the mainstream or art sectors. I want to oppose this attitude: it is important that work taking (and offering) different positions is presented as more than just an interesting diversion generating a totally different kind of discussion. First, its inclusion works against the nearly complete domination of narrative feature films and mainstream television in the film and media studies curricula. I feel this stranglehold (reproducing the cultural hegemony which exists outside the classroom) discourages students from thinking in different ways and seeing other possibilities, not just from familiar forms but also from the range of meanings that

these forms make possible.

Secondly, this can provide models for practical work in the classroom which does not merely seek to initiate 'professionalism' and all its accompanying assumptions. Discussion of such assumptions does not in itself encourage students to consider different kinds of constructions. Screening work which exhibits a different range of possibilities *empowers* students to develop ways of making their own representations, to find new 'voices', to make other meanings possible.

There are various reasons for the reluctance to use independent work, the most commonly voiced being that it is more difficult (even 'inappropriate') to teach because the students 'won't like it', won't immediately *enjoy* it (which is very often a thinly-veiled excuse for the teacher's own dislike). I would not want to dismiss this too easily, as there are sound pedagogic reasons behind such apparently populist disdain (as well as those of lack of confidence or commitment, of pessimism, fear, etc), notably the wish to work from the students' own knowledges and responses rather than imposing ideas on them 'from above'.

But we often have to work against student responses to dominant cinema and television (for example, those involving racism, sexism, etc) even if we recognise why they come to hold such views and their intimate connection with these forms of representation themselves. Their reactions to other forms of film or video are equally influenced by their histories. The dominance of realist narrative fiction makes it seem quite natural that all new work should adopt a similar form, even if with a different content. And media teachers have a difficult enough job fighting the rest of the curriculum without having to work against the whole of the world's communications industries and cultural competence. But if media teachers won't help in transforming these, who will?

I find myself caught between two conflicting positions here. On one hand I want to fight the defensiveness, conservatism and complacency that informs positions like these, to press for experimental and independent work to be taken up in schools and colleges below higher education level (even though I'm generally told I don't have a grip on the realities of classroom experience now I've 'deserted' to higher

66 education myself). On the other hand I can't completely dismiss the criticisms this position levels: of insularity, of the esotericism of formal questions, of speaking to the initiated, that the language used is too difficult (read unfamiliar), the work too bound by theory. But the most damning criticisms of all, in my opinion (and they are linked), are that alternative work often does not reflect carefully enough on its processes of informing, of asking questions – in short on questions of pedagogy – and that it often lacks a clear sense of its audience (precisely because it is trying to raise different questions, it has to construct a new kind of address and ask the spectator to respond in different, unfamiliar, ways) or is intended for an adult audience.

These criticisms raise two very important questions for practitioners and teachers: first, how to construct an address which specifically engages *young* people, rather than requiring them to cross the boundaries of their own experience and knowledge; and secondly, how do we *teach with* this, rather than expect it to *stand in for* teaching and do it all for us?

To consider how alternative media can be used in relation to teaching about conventional forms, it is useful to see this work in terms of an inquiry, first of all examining how it experiments with the ways in which film/video can be used, bringing in notions of language and representation to consider what kinds of images, impressions and connections can be made. This inquiry can then be mobilised to undermine and transform the conventions of dominant film and television. Again this involves considering these forms as languages, investigating the notion of realism that conventional representations are based on and taking on the question of 'why?' which underlies student responses to work that opposes these conventions. It is the consensus view of 'reality' which such alternative work attempts to question, and this is where the question 'why?' can take us.

These perspectives give us a starting point from which to teach, a way of unravelling what it is in dominant representations that is being opposed, providing an analysis of the conventional uses of images and sounds, to go on to look at how alternative work shows up and transforms the ways we engage with representations as both spectators and producers of meanings. From there we can start to think

about what the films are *doing*, what new kind of activity alternative work makes possible (in other words their positive characteristics) instead of thinking about what they are *not doing* and what we *don't get*: conventional pleasures (which is only a way of talking about conventional cinematic practices under a different guise).

While we don't want to start with the ways in which this work 'fails' to meet our expectations, we should not lose sight of its *difference from* conventional film narratives. Looking at what independent work does, the terms of its construction, the disturbances it can provoke and the connections it can achieve, we can begin to make sense of the gap between it and conventional representations. This enables students to think about differences between representations and to reread dominant forms.

Such an approach offers a way of thinking about forms and readings and how they are connected rather than just familiarising students with new forms in order to achieve accomplished interpretations. Hopefully this will promote an understanding of what's at stake in these differences, refusing to assess them merely in comparison to the dominant 'standards' and making judgements by reference to these norms of familiar pleasures and conventional cultural expectations. Instead, while recognising the hierarchical structures that produce such frames of reference, we can assert a perspective that defines representation according to a *range* of different forms, each constructed according to its own terms.

This takes me to the question of why we teach film/media anyway. Because I would want to propose it is not only to understand how they work, but what kind of meanings they offer, and how. Annette Kuhn, in *Women's Pictures*, describes this as looking at:

*a society's representation of itself within and for itself and the ways in which people both live out and produce those representations.*<sup>1</sup>

This cultural studies approach to representation can accommodate the differential relationships

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<sup>1</sup> Annette Kuhn, *Women's Pictures*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982, p 4.



individuals have to images produced within culture, by looking at the different positions we occupy in relation to dominant forms.

Certain possibilities for identification and certain social groups, are presented more centrally than others, in cultural definitions of gender, class, race and, significantly for students, age. Other identities, and other groups, are excluded from culturally sanctioned representations or denied representation altogether. Consequently, for example, the absence of certain images of women can be seen to actively marginalise certain possibilities of identification and thus provide a restricted definition of femininity.

But once we have acknowledged how this happens in dominant representations—what next? Do we endlessly go on describing these hierarchies? Or do we as teachers undertake more than just demonstrating that these definitions are not natural but constructed, not fixed but changeable. Shouldn't we go on to look at other definitions, different kinds of representations, which use different forms, raise

different questions?

I believe that we *have* to use alternative media in order to enable students to think through different frameworks. This relates the use of practical media work in schools and colleges (student production of representations which involve the histories and experiences and knowledges that form their identities) with critical media work (looking at a range of forms, acknowledging different approaches and dealing with work that raises alternative questions and ideas, to give students different models for understanding their own experiences).

I hope this gives us a way to think through both teaching about such media work and also the kinds of strategies that independent film and video-makers might be adopting to connect their work with education. Both sectors are concerned with a self-reflexive approach to their own practices and while we may not be working in exactly the same direction, we can at least become allied through acknowledging a pedagogy that produces critical, active, engaged students and spectators.

*m/f*

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# CHILD'S PLAY

## TELEVISION VIEWING AND THE GAMES OF EARLY CHILDHOOD, BY RICHARD EKE



Tele-viewing in an inner-city junior classroom. (Photo by Richard Eke)

Play is the business of children. The work of Valerie Walkerdine and her collaborators<sup>1</sup> has illustrated ways in which the observer's gaze and the practices connected with such a gaze constitute the objects of which they speak. I want to suggest here some constituents of a gaze, which does not entirely exclude a Piagetian perspective, which can serve to caution against too rapid a move to identify the nature of children's play and the particulars of its production. Notions that children simply imitate, or in imitation only identify, when they are playing 'Let's pretend games' are reductionist in nature. I want to focus on this kind of play in particular because of the observed connections

between 'Let's pretend play' and television viewing ('Let's pretend I'm Superman'). The temptation of this apparent connection lies in the causality we can impute to it, that children playing in a particular way are caused to do so by particular television viewing. This article will illustrate some of the problems that are at issue in terms of reading both children's play and their television viewing and to suggest ways in which these might be connected.

A focus on let's pretend play, however it is

<sup>1</sup> Valerie Walkerdine, 'Developmental Psychology and Child-Centred Pedagogy', in Henriques et al (eds), *Changing the Subject*, London, Methuen, 1984.

explained, is a focus on the activities of children who are typically between the ages of two and six years. In Piaget's term, this pre-operational stage is characterised by the use of symbols in thought but marked by the absence of logic. On the detail of the developments from symbolic to logical thinking there have been some telling criticisms of Piaget's work. The Piagetian explanation is that concrete operations (logical thought) are brought about through the internalisation of action. However, the production of 'concrete operations' may be better explained through a developing understanding of the manners in which various kinds of discourse are produced. Details of the pre-operational stage in Piaget's work are comparatively brief and as its title implies he represents the stage in terms of what it is not rather than what it is. Researchers working in the broad Piagetian tradition such as Margaret Donaldson<sup>2</sup>, Chris Athey<sup>3</sup>, and Catherine Garvey<sup>4</sup> have begun to fill in some of the gaps around this period and to reinforce the significance of representation and of what is represented by children of this age.

Donaldson's exploration of Piagetian dialogues points towards the significance of meaning in such exchanges. The manner in which the 'context' is used as a kind of 'bolt on' to existing Piagetian orthodoxies rather than as the site of production has been criticised. Her evidence points us directly towards the impact that a meaningful exchange has in terms of the 'level of cognition' exhibited by children. This focus on meaning is characteristic of recent work connected with this stage of development. Athey, for example, points up the meaning of much symbolic play and representation in terms of children's organisation of space, while Garvey emphasises the ways in which social play is defined as such by participants.

Athey's report focuses on the involvement of parents with the education of nursery children. She argues that there is a very specific way in which adults can intervene in young children's development when they recognise or try to extend the learning of the child 'with knowledge of the child's prevailing schemas', defined as patterns of repeatable and generalisable actions which can be applied to objects and events. In her article Athey identifies an enveloping schema, which I take to be indicative of the many systematic explorations by children she

observed. From Piaget's work<sup>5</sup> we may assume that other schematic concerns include proximity, order, continuity, rotation and other spatial representations built up through the organisation of actions performed on objects in space. The evidence of this enveloping schema can be found in the child's graphic representations, symbolic play and in the range of experience that can be assimilated to them. We can observe children represent their growing awareness of the spatial through symbolic play and representation, and assimilate new experiences to their spatial schemas. The prospect thus arises that children may not be simply imitating the televisual but may be engaged in assimilation and accommodation with regard to their understanding of space.

Catherine Garvey's work illustrates the importance of language as the vehicle for make-believe play and illustrates some of the 'rounds' that this involves. Children often mark that they are engaging in make-believe play – 'Let's pretend' or 'I'll be Superman' – and where such markers are absent they quickly cross-check with each other – 'I want to use the potty' 'Really?' 'No, pretend'. Children follow the 'rules' of the game, particularly that of reciprocating, recognising whose turn it is and that roles and attributes must remain constant throughout the episode. If 'I'm Superman' at the start, moving out of character requires correction – 'No, you're Superman, remember', 'OK'. The very social nature of play requires that it is a shared activity – if you won't let me be Superman we can't play that game, if we do then the development of the theme is mutual. Children are fairly subtle at signalling to each other that a game has changed or terminated, or although minimally marked (say by intonation change) that it is a piece of social play.

When we move rapidly to assume that a boy's assertion that he is 'He-man' is a negative

<sup>2</sup> Margaret Donaldson, *Children's Minds*, London, Fontana, 1978.

<sup>3</sup> Chris Athey, 'Parental Involvement in Nursery Education', *Early Childhood*, December 1980, pp 4-9.

<sup>4</sup> Catherine Garvey, 'Some Properties of Social Play', in Margaret Donaldson et al (eds), *Early Childhood Development and Education*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1983.

<sup>5</sup> Jean Piaget, *The Child's Conception of Space*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1956.

70 consequence of television viewing we might do better to stop and consider the social and spatial nature of such play as well as recognising the narratives that are being borrowed in such activity. Brief surveys of children in the six-to-seven year range conducted by colleagues suggest that favourite TV characters have comparatively little impact on their playground activities although the characters and plots are frequently used by children, especially boys, as models in their classroom writing. A specific problem arises in the purchase and use of TV orientated toys, in which the use of toys which are accurate in every detail becomes a prerequisite to television-related play and shows interesting connections with the complexity of detail in children's drawings which begins to occur at about the same time.<sup>6</sup>

An emphasis on reading children's play in this way positions adults as voyeurs observing children's play, making sure we have a full reading of it, before we intervene. Walkerdine<sup>7</sup> has demonstrated the manner in which teachers of the very young are assigned the task of surveillance, recognising the spatial/symbolic/cognitive dimensions of children's activities and then making suitable provisions for them. It could easily be argued that this is the way in which stress can be produced for teachers which we can then assert that they are suffering from.

If the production of accounts of play are problematic then those of becoming a viewer are doubly so. The nature of what it is to become a viewer is identified through studies of children's involvement with network television, its formats, codes, genres and so on. Thus in a very real sense we can talk of what it is to become a viewer being produced by broadcasters. But the viewer is also produced by those who research viewing, both in the sense that Walkerdine means, and in the sense that research data is used by broadcasters in the production of television which researchers then investigate, establishing a circular process. Working in a similar area David Buckingham<sup>8</sup> has begun to show how textual analysis may be used to raise issues about how children 'read television' which are not produced in a circular fashion. He also suggests that we need to work against simplistic explanations of what young viewers do in reading television. What I shall offer here is a partial response to

simplistic responses to children's viewing. In so doing I want to contest the idea that a child pretending to be a super-hero is taking on all the cultural baggage entailed in such representations, for example, gender identities and power positions within the text.

To become viewers young children must first learn to attend to the medium and there is strong evidence to suggest that this typically occurs at around 2½ years of age, that attention implies comprehension, and that attention is often cued by the formal features of the medium. Findings of this kind are based upon 'active' rather than 'reactive' notions of television viewing. Daniel Anderson and Elizabeth Lorch<sup>9</sup>, pursuing an 'active' review of research data, report on the relationships involved: during periods of inattention auditory changes (sound effects, laughter, women's voices, children's voices, peculiar voices and instrumental music) elicit attention. During periods of attention representations of black men, black boys, white women, active stationary behaviour, cuts, and motion (the latter being explicit, concrete and visual) maintain attention and so do children's voices, rhyming, and sound effects. (Considering these findings, Anderson and Lorch significantly fail to differentiate the race and gender of their research subjects.)

If such features encourage children to attend to television, then others will 'turn them off'. When the action and especially the dialogue becomes incomprehensible children will often scan the room to see what others are doing, return to playing with toys and so on. Other turn-offs include pans, zooms, still photos, men's voices and slow music.

A more complex argument can begin to take shape in which the qualities of children's make-

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<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Jacqueline Goodnow, *Children's Drawing*, London, Fontana, 1983.

<sup>7</sup> Valerie Walkerdine, 'Sex, Power and Pedagogy', *Screen Education* 38, Spring 1981, pp 14-24.

<sup>8</sup> David Buckingham, 'You and Me: the Construction of Subjectivity in Television for the Pre-School Child'. Paper presented to the 1986 International Television Studies Conference, University of London Institute of Education.

<sup>9</sup> Daniel Anderson and Elizabeth Puggles Lorch, 'Looking at Television: Action or Reaction?' in J Bryant and D Anderson (eds), *Children's Understanding of Television: Research on Attention and Comprehension*, London, Academic Press, 1983.

believe play identified earlier appear to have an almost direct correspondence with the features of television to which children are likely to attend, dialogue they can understand and visible activity. How children sign real/pretend distinctions, for example, can be related to the way in which programme boundaries are established.

Imagine a pair of young children playing at being Superman and his prisoner, one putting the other into a large cardboard box, and then switching roles. In all this we might see children exploring spatial relationships (an enveloping schema) and social relationships (an asymmetrical round of play) which they have signed as pretend play. In so doing they may be taking on something of the characterisations they are using to produce particular representations.

If children are to produce particular characterisations in detail they need to have a detailed picture of how that character is already represented. Addressing this issue (the others being viewing preferences, programme boundaries, and televisual/real life comparisons) Leona Jaglom and Howard Gardner<sup>10</sup> reach some interesting conclusions. From their observations it would seem that at around two years of age children like to name characters, describe them in terms of a single physical characteristic and their locations. Three-to-four year olds shift to identifying differences and similarities between characters and are able to discuss several features of them simultaneously, although the use of a single trait continues. By five, children's systems of organisation:

*include individual shows as well as groups of show types classified in terms of visual format, target audience, scheduling, and purpose. Their system also includes individual characters who are linked primarily to individual shows, as well as character types that are grouped according to physical appearance, behaviours, psychological characteristics and their interactions with others.*<sup>11</sup>

From Jaglom and Gardner's research on TV/real life distinctions it would seem that two year olds test such distinctions through adopting the roles of television characters, although television's status as a world in itself has not been established. By about three it has been. Three year olds imitate characters when they are not on television and acknowledge distinctions between the real and the televisual (people only fly on

TV). By four, different uses are found for the medium: 'the real' presented on television can be recognised, while at the same time it is acknowledged that nothing is ever real on television, not even themselves when represented televisually. The distinctions between real and make-believe are explored by children in television watching as they are in play. The idea that children 'pick up' the entire representation of *Superman* in their play is challenged by the close attention to single physical details to which they attend. The more complex understanding necessary to acquire its potential sexist implications only arises towards the end of the pre-school years, and more research remains to be done on this age-range.

There are general problems with the way in which the Piagetian gaze constitutes itself and the objects of which it speaks; many of these are common to any attempt to address issues of childhood by observational means. Since the studies drawn on here illustrate the kinds of struggles children engage with in learning both to represent their world and to understand the representations of others, they may be less problematic than much Piagetian work. Such accounts do not, of themselves, exclude the possibility that 'logical thinking' is the product of entry into particular discourses and go some way to suggest the kind of struggles children engage with to achieve this. Piagetian accounts of the pre-operational thinking which consider the development of children's understandings of signifier/signified relations may be reasonably unproblematic in this context, but the status and validity of the processes of accommodation, assimilation and adaptation remain to be examined.

The emphasis here has been on children's production of meaning through establishing signifier/signified relations with particular reference to the representation of space, the construction of dialogue, and the signing of real/not real distinctions. I have tried to suggest that children's involvement with television is

<sup>10</sup> Leona Jaglom and Howard Gardner, 'The Pre-School Television Viewer as Anthropologist' in Howard Gardner and Hope Kelly (eds), *New Directions in Child Development: Viewing Children through Television*, San Francisco, Jossey Bass, 1981.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid*, p 22.

72      cued to these same representational problems. Accounts of children's imitative play based on viewing are thus moved to accounts of children's struggles with representation. Play of this kind can be seen as being primarily about the representation of spatial or social events which are very similar to those aspects of television which children attend to and can describe. Rather than being seen as imitation, this kind of play should be seen as production in which signifier/signified relations in one medium (television) are translated to those in another,

play. It can be argued that it is in such translations that a fuller understanding of the operation and power of various forms of representation is achieved.

Considerations such as these have implications for theorising about childhood, about the nature of television provision for young children and for the practices of media education with this age range. Perhaps the first issue that needs to be examined is how children become caught up with particular representations and the positions characters occupy within them.

## **NOTICE OF THE SEFT ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

**The Annual General Meeting of the Society for Education in Film and Television will take place in London on Saturday, December 6 1986. In addition to SEFT business, there will be workshop discussions on media education, theory and policy. There will also be a screening of a new British film, and the maker(s) will be invited to discuss it.**

**Nominations are invited for the post of Chair and for 9 members of the Executive Committee. Names of nominees (together with a brief statement and the names of 1 proposer and 1 seconder) should be received at the SEFT office, 29 Old Compton Street, London W1V 5PL, by October 6, 1986. Nominees, proposers and seconders must all be members of the Society for Education in Film and Television. Membership is either through subscription to *Screen* or *Initiatives*. All motions to be put before the AGM should also be received at the SEFT office by October 6, 1986.**

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# ANTI-RACIST INITIATIVES

BY CHRIS RICHARDS



Film work in an inner-city junior classroom. (Photo by Steve Howard)

Most of what constitutes anti-racist teaching necessarily poses the problems of pedagogy in a particularly critical way. Given the use of 'pedagogy' to designate the whole set of relations implicated in the process of teaching and being taught, rather than a more narrow definition as 'teaching style' or 'teaching strategy', I want to argue that pedagogy is a priority and not an issue to be tackled only after getting a definition of anti-racism or an anti-racist analysis of media material into a course or syllabus. Because racism is something in which we may well all participate and in which those we teach are themselves involved, anti-racist teaching means intervention in the formation of ourselves and others; it is an attempt to redefine the subject and can be

resisted, as an intrusion of class and institutional power into the 'personal' space of those without, or with less of, that power.

As teachers, we might—usually do—choose to make attempts to reconstruct ourselves and have long personal histories of using educational institutions as the most appropriate context in which to achieve a variety of reconstructions and developments. We can't *assume* that the people we teach have any similar orientation towards educational institutions, towards lessons, towards being taught; on the contrary, where people are being taught more or less compulsorily or have a strong instrumental understanding of education, the orientation is likely to be one which *defines* boundaries between what is personal and what is



a matter of public skill or competence. I think these boundaries are much more fundamental than we, as teachers, usually realise. I mean that 'being taught' is understood as a more external process, as an activity involving quite a circumscribed region of subjectivity. (Note the provisional, loosely descriptive character of these terms.) The precise form of this boundary, or where it is drawn, needs to be specified in relation to the particularities of class, of gender and of race. 'Being taught' may be something in which people acquiesce or concede almost *on condition* that it does not undermine or weaken or challenge the boundaries between 'private' and 'public' of subjectivity.

There are a lot of good reasons for maintaining these boundaries and, clearly, the institutional processes clustered under the title 'education' are not all worth perpetuating. There are processes which people do need to resist or to control by maintaining a distinction between a personal region of subjectivity and a more external one: there are ways of learning and of using knowledge without compromising that distinction. In teaching Media Studies to groups of white and black working-class adolescents (14-16), often mainly boys, I found that they maintained an interest in learning how to use cameras, video and would go through the production of photoplays without becoming dissatisfied. But if it became apparent that I was addressing issues which involved them in talking about what they felt, blocks and resistances became evident, indicating that a distinction between an external, public knowledge and a private, 'informal' knowledge was being made. Another way of formulating this might be to suggest that there are educational discourses within which they recognised themselves-as-pupils, the legitimate subject position in a school; a discourse which does not address them as pupils, in its more narrowly legitimated sense, is initially rejected because it brings into conflict a variety of subjectivities, constituted within a range of discourses which do not cohere. (The mechanisms of this rejection do need to be specified further, with reference particularly to class and gender.)

Anti-racist teaching necessarily brings into question the formation of subjects and will inevitably involve challenges to elements of the informal culture in which those we teach

participate: jokes and routine insults are obvious examples. Clearly teachers must include themselves in forms of anti-racist education and not just in order to persuade those we teach to allow a redefinition of the boundary between the public and the private. But, beyond that, we do need to work explicitly on the nature of our own power, the construction of one's own particular authority as a teacher. This raises a whole complex of questions involving age and class, race and gender but also forms of institution, popular representations of teachers, the political conjuncture, etc.

I want to use two examples from classroom discussion to emphasise the need to examine how we are implicated in and addressed by forms of racism; given the past composition of these seminars that 'we' is notably homogeneous, white. First of all, take the apparently bland meaninglessness of our names, the way in which they just seem anonymous (self-erasing), normal names. I think we perceive them in this way just because we are in a position of cultural power which enables us to see ourselves as belonging to a modern nation-state and, really, beyond that, there's no strong sense of a need to specify the meaning of our names in any *lesser* terms, in terms of discourses with less power. The first time I took one class at Harrow College a girl identified herself as ANN Sharma; she routinely modified ANU in that way. The obligation to do so is imposed by a discourse which subordinates and defines other names as belonging to 'ethnic' groups or 'regions'. Suppose that we were all obliged to define our names in 'ethnic' or 'regional' terms; the obligation implies a loss of power. We don't even attach class connotations to our names very successfully because it is their belonging to a unity called a nation which has been secured ideologically over centuries.

A further example: I think we tend to see other people's life histories as determined and our own as relatively free. I was doing some work on projected life histories with a group of girls in a communications class: about two-thirds white, one-third black (all but one Asian). At first the Asian girls rejected the discussion, saying 'It's different for us...', by which they meant that there was no point in talking about this, or writing it down, because it's all laid down anyway. 'When we're 25, we'll be married, mainly looking after kids, maybe doing just a bit

76 of part-time work....' But what did become apparent by the end of the session when smaller groups and individuals had each contributed to a discussion involving the whole group (and which involved me saying quite a lot about what I had done at particular ages), was that the whites present also had quite rigidly defined, and similar, actual and projected life histories. The point was not to liquidate differences, to say we're all the same, but to show that the distinction between whites as free to make choices and blacks as determined could not be sustained. The implicit contrast between ourselves, with freedom from a specific determining culture, and Asians bound by their 'archaic', 'ethnic' culture was recognised as an articulation of racist ideology. Clearly this contrast requires further examination in relation to examples of TV programmes which address issues such as arranged marriage, but it also enables one to challenge a central and characteristic ideological refusal of our own determinate social existence: 'we (whites) are beyond all those primitive customs like arranged marriage which survive only among ethnic

minorities... we're free to choose, aren't we?'

The pedagogic strategies that need to be developed out of anti-racism need to problematise pedagogy itself, to make who we 'are' of fundamental concern. There's a need to develop something I have to call collective auto-ethnography, a process of self-documentation which does not stay within the categories of experience, anecdote, the personal, but does work on and address those categories; it is a matter of exploring the empirical centre of the abstractly theorised 'subject' and of working to change the subject through a process I'll call 'depersonalisation'.

The emphasis of the term 'depersonalisation' connects with what I've said about the boundary between personal and public regions of subjectivity and the problem of resistances to an anti-racist teaching which seems to intrude on what is personal. Perhaps I should say that what I've so far described as *regions* of subjectivity, between which there are boundaries, are constituted discursively and might therefore be defined as differing sets of subject positions: within the multiplicity of subject positions some



Recording a voice-over in a junior classroom. (Photo by Steve Howard)

might be grouped as belonging to the set we call 'personal', others will belong to the 'public'. The geographical metaphor needn't be abandoned but it doesn't allow a sufficient emphasis on the lack of cohesion between 'regions'. In *teaching* the general strategy should be to render the personal impersonal, to address and to redefine what is constitutive of the personal in terms which invite examination and questioning of those boundaries between what is thought of as the individual, and the social matrix out there, an external body of institutions, society. The specific version of this collective auto-ethnography relevant to Media Studies is the documentation and analysis of readings by those who have produced the readings themselves.

When representations are (re)presented to groups there should be a systematic attempt to record discussion, to keep and use and develop written (or recorded) readings of these representations. Obviously a basis of familiarity and confidence is necessary if this work is to proceed at all, particularly if discussion is to be taped. Those readings are both material which can be used as a basis for analysis of the meanings attributed to particular representations and of the discourses within which those readings have been produced. The analysis of those discourses is essential to show the structured social basis of those apparently 'personal responses'. This is both necessary analytic work and a means of refusing any simple labelling of individuals as racist, as if people are somehow entirely responsible for their own formation. This analysis can only be fully appropriated by students themselves when they have understood that reading images is an activity, and that meanings are not read off without being constructed interdiscursively. Drawing attention to the different readings produced by distinct groups can further this aim. And, beyond this, recognising the structured limits of the readings 'one' is able to produce *can* lead into a fracturing of that sense of absolute legitimacy in assigning meanings to familiar (because often represented) people and events.

A related strategy may be to specify a topic with a group of students and generate repertoires of meaning around the topic *before* viewing any specific media representations at all. In this case the intention is also to open up the empirical ground of particular subjectivities. Take a word

such as 'riot' or the name of a place, 'Handsworth', and around such words build up a record of what the members of a group attribute to it; assemble a catalogue of the meanings attributed to the word(s). The particular representation (be it an image or a whole programme) may then be viewed in relation to an already defined, articulated set of meanings. As such this is probably a familiar teaching strategy. But to make it an anti-racist strategy, it is necessary to consider in what ways the representation confirms, challenges, modifies or denies the shared repertoire of meanings produced by the group. Beyond this it is necessary to raise questions about the sources, characteristics and adequacy of the repertoire produced by the group. Again both the representation, and the basis of the reading engaged in, are being identified as objects of study; it is the interdiscursive production of meaning, and *not* simply *either* the representation *or* the viewing subjects, which constitutes our concern.

Anti-racism requires an explicit moral and political position (even though that position can be shared by quite disparate groups) and, clearly, anti-racism implies teaching which contests racism; it doesn't just address questions of 'race' as of academic or topical interest. Anti-racist policies require judgements about what is, or isn't, racist. Given what I've said about the determination of meaning so far, there are clearly some difficulties in defining the relationship between work in Media Studies and anti-racist policies. Anyway, I think there's an argument about the term 'adequacy' which can at least indicate some of the problems. I use the word to indicate the problems involved in differentiating, and judging, a whole range of types of representation of social life. I mean that range to extend beyond what we define as media texts. 'Adequacy' means, in my usage, the extent to which a representation enables one to understand both that representation and what it appears to represent. It implies assessing the terms which a representation makes available, the terms which the representation enables us to think with. This isn't a matter of realist aesthetics because the term need carry no narrow prescription of form and does not entail any necessary correspondence between the representation and dominant forms of knowledge. But it does make explicit the

78 activity of distinguishing between representations in terms of the extent to which they allow a productive, political understanding of what they represent. Take these examples from *Visible Fictions*:

*The conception of the newsworthy that is shared by TV and most newspapers... produces an excessive concentration on one form of event (or one perception of what an event might be) and so neglects the events which occur 'in between', and provide the framework and basis for understanding how the isolated and exceptional events might have come about.*

*Current affairs and news do not construct history, and hardly ever situate the present in terms of the past: indeed, it can be said that those TV programmes that attempt this task have not yet succeeded in developing a form adequate to it.<sup>1</sup>*

There is here an implicit distinction between the type of representation in question (news and current affairs) and what is necessary to understand 'events' or 'history'. Of course the operation of such a concept as adequacy requires us to have some theory of knowledge in terms of which to 'assess' any representation, and in the two brief quotes from John Ellis, it is apparent that such a theory is *assumed*. I think it's necessary to be more explicit about the theories of knowledge we are committed to and to place more centrally the question of relativism. The argument that meanings are not fixed but are produced in the process of consumption/reading of texts by particular subjects is not one I want to undermine, but I am concerned about the way the emphasis of that argument can lead to the position that texts mean what their readers think they mean. It's essential to qualify this by stressing that most texts set distinct limits to what can be read from them and that reading is a matter of active negotiation, struggle, sometimes rejection, of the 'terms' offered by the text; the 'knowledge position' from which we read, from which we negotiate, is what we need to be more explicit about and is what we need to recognise and interrogate as a particular historical formation. I think it's necessary to do that because without it the credibility of a particular position cannot be sustained and because, more particularly in this context, pursuing an anti-racist position co-exists uneasily with practices which have been formed within a professional

ideology of neutrality and of relativism.

To sustain the credibility of a particular knowledge position requires *both* a refusal of a simple and fixed hierarchy of discourses and a commitment to producing, in Catherine Belsey's words, 'new, more coherent discourses which, until their own contradictions are exposed, can lay claim to the status of knowledge. Such a knowledge, though it is tested in practice, does not seek a guarantee in an extra-discursive order of reality. At the same time, it is never final, always hypothetical, always ready to recognize the possibility of its own incoherence.'<sup>2</sup> Some discourses better enable us to understand the particular historical formation within which we live and can be seen as having an adequacy which is both provisional and political. Knowledge, as Belsey suggests, can be seen as discursively produced in the process of *conflict between* discourses rather than in a simple correspondence between a particular type of discourse and an extra-discursive reality.

If one takes the notion of political adequacy further, it is necessary to ask, from an anti-racist position, in what sense media education constitutes an 'adequate' discipline. Clearly media education poses central questions about the processes of representation, about what it takes to produce and circulate particular representations and what categories of people have access to those processes. Equally, it poses questions about what is involved in reading those representations, about what categories of people read them, when-where-how and even why. But racism isn't just something confined to or engendered by the media, it isn't just an effect of TV and the press 'misleading' and 'misinforming' people. Anti-racist teaching must also examine *what* is represented and must engage in producing challenges to the dominant definitions and explanations of that whole range of racist practices which are not particular to the media. So of course anti-racism is a cross-curricular initiative and doesn't necessarily privilege media education; a more obvious

<sup>1</sup> John Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982, pp 16-17.

<sup>2</sup> Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice*, London, Methuen, 1980, pp 63-64.

existing disciplinary target might be history. But it would be a serious mistake to address existing subject areas in this way and, in doing so, risk both perpetuating their insulation from each other and their separation from everything that counts as popular, current knowledge, for both teachers and students.

Media education might therefore be seen as a bridging strategy which could enable both the insulation and the separation to be overcome: a single TV programme can be seen as relating to several disciplines and, equally, could involve challenging the still entrenched distinction between 'serious' and 'popular' knowledge. Of particular importance here would be the recognition that some forms of 'serious', legitimated, knowledge are more implicated in

forms of racism than some forms of 'popular', non-school knowledge: media education has to refuse any part in reproducing a simple distinction between the sanctity of educational discourse and the profanity of the popular media, and it might well provide the position from which a critique of educational racism could be developed (through analysis of the curriculum and of school texts, etc). This can also serve to further that work upon the multiple, contradictory and competing 'address' of discourses: the contradictions between the various attempts to interpellate the subject do need to be foregrounded and worked through. It is in the lack of a final fix within any single discourse that the possibilities for contesting the power of racist discourses must be placed.

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# AGAINST DEMYSTIFICATION

A RESPONSE TO 'TEACHING THE MEDIA'  
BY DAVID BUCKINGHAM

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<sup>1</sup> Len Masterman, *Teaching the Media*, London, Comedia, 1985. (Specific page citations will be included in the text.)

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<sup>2</sup> Brian Simon, 'Why No Pedagogy in England?' in *Does Education Matter?* London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1985.

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IN THE WORDS of its publisher's blurb, *Teaching the Media*<sup>1</sup> aims to be 'a comprehensive study of Media Education which will be an indispensable guide to all teachers and students of the media'. In addition to its overall rationale for Media Education, the book provides some admirably detailed accounts of a number of central aspects of the field, many of which are among the most neglected. If only for the sheer volume of useful information it contains, *Teaching the Media* is likely to be seen by many teachers as essential reading. In this article I shall raise some questions about the map of the subject field which Masterman provides, and suggest some difficulties in translating his proposals into practical teaching strategies. In the process, I shall seek to identify some crucial and debilitating *absences* in his account—absences which are a common feature of much recent work on Media Education.

In a recent article, Brian Simon argues that curriculum change in Britain

*has not been informed by any generally accepted (or publically formulated) ideas or theories about the nature of the child or the learning process.*

Among the reasons for this, he identifies the

*wide acceptance of the unresolved dichotomies between 'progressive' and 'traditional', 'child-centred' and 'subject-centred' approaches, or more generally, between the 'informal' and 'formal'. Such crude, generalised categories are basically meaningless, but expressed in this form deflect attention from the real problems of teaching and learning.*<sup>2</sup>

While there are certainly exceptions to Simon's argument, I would suggest that this tendency has been particularly prevalent in Media

Education. More often than not, debates about pedagogy have addressed ideologies of *teaching style*, yet they have rarely offered any account of the *learning process*. Both Masterman (pp34-37) and Hartley *et al* in *Making Sense of the Media* devote relatively brief sections to a discussion of the 'traditional' versus 'progressive' debate in Media Education<sup>3</sup>, yet they fail to describe or theorise learning in anything but the most general and rhetorical of terms.

If we compare books like *Teaching the Media* and *Making Sense of the Media* with books on teaching English, this absence is even more remarkable. While it is certainly true that a good deal of work on the latter suffers from an excess of gushing wonderment at the marvels of children learning, it has increasingly been informed by complex and *materialist* theories of language and the learning process. This applies not merely to accounts of language teaching but also to recent work on literature teaching<sup>4</sup>. By comparison, books on Media Education read rather like teachers' manifestos, which take learning entirely for granted.

This absence is perhaps partly due to the dearth of classroom research in Media Education<sup>5</sup>, but it is also, I would argue, a function of the way in which the subject field itself has come to be defined. The development of Media Education is commonly presented as a steady progression from English, through Film Studies and into Media Studies. While a good deal has been gained in this development, I would argue that much has been lost; and that if we are to make the crucial transition from Media Studies to Media Education, we will need to recover, critically and selectively, the positive merits of those 'earlier' traditions, as well as recognising that we have much to learn from other disciplines. In particular, we need to develop a theory of *learning* which goes beyond the sterile dichotomies Simon identifies.

## II

Len Masterman's *Teaching about Television* is described by the publishers of his most recent book as 'arguably the most influential book on media education this decade'. I doubt whether there is in fact much argument to be had: Masterman's approach to the subject has largely defined the field for a generation of teachers. His statement of the aims of 'television education' in that earlier book has become the commonsense paradigm:

*Television education is therefore a demythologising process which will reveal the selective practices by which images reach the television screen, emphasise the constructed nature of the representations projected, and make explicit their suppressed ideological function. Such an education will also necessarily be concerned with alternative realities—those constructions implicitly rejected, suppressed or filtered out by the images which appear on the screen....*<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> John Hartley *et al*, *Making Sense of the Media*, London, Comedia, 1985, Block 3 Unit 3.

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<sup>4</sup> e.g. Talk Workshop Group, *Becoming Our Own Experts*, Talk Workshop Group, 1982; Janet Batsleer *et al*, *Rewriting English*, London, Methuen, 1985; Tony Burgess, 'The Question of English', in Margaret Meek and Jane Miller (eds), *Changing English*, University of London Institute of Education/Heinemann, 1984.

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<sup>5</sup> The only example of which I am aware is Michael O'Shaughnessy's 'Watching Media Studies', *Screen Education* no 38, Spring 1981, pp 80-85.

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<sup>6</sup> Len Masterman, *Teaching about Television*, London, Macmillan, 1979, p 9.

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Masterman summarises his definition of the subject as follows:

*To recapitulate: in television studies the field of investigation is constituted by the flow of information communicated to us by the medium. In spite of the apparent transparency, neutrality and diversity of function of this information it is both mediated and ideological. Mediation and ideology are themselves inextricably intertwined. Mediation is an ideological process, whilst ideology becomes visible the moment that mediation processes are pinned down.<sup>7</sup>*

These statements raise a number of difficulties. The definition of television as a 'flow of information' and the emphasis on 'mediation' are perhaps appropriate to news or documentary, but they seem reductive as an account of many other areas of television. More crucially, the notion of 'demythologising', of making ideology 'visible', and thus revealing a 'suppressed ideological function', begs many questions about how we define ideology and how we might teach about it. To what extent can the identification of ideology be seen as a process of unmasking or exposing the underlying values of a text? Is ideology something *inherent* in texts? Do false ideologies arise simply from a lack of correct information – and can they be eradicated merely by confronting them with 'alternative realities'? How are these realities themselves to be defined and made available?

Masterman's view of Media Education as a demythologising process, or, to use a term he employs more consistently, as 'demystification' seems to arise from a basic definition of ideology as *false consciousness*. It is this definition which, I shall argue, continues to inform *Teaching the Media*. Despite Masterman's attempt to take on board theories of reading and pleasure, his overall view remains that Media Education is fundamentally a matter of liberating students from the false beliefs they acquire from the media. My criticism in this article stems from a conviction that if Media Education is to develop a more productive theory of learning it will need to draw upon more complex accounts of ideology and subjectivity.

### III

For Masterman, Media Education is essentially a crusade:

*... media teachers can justifiably see themselves in the very vanguard of their profession. They can play a leading role in shaping a public consciousness capable of articulating the public interest and of urging popular control of information and of information-generating institutions, particularly in the educational sphere. They can do this by encouraging discussion, participation in, and critical judgement of, these issues by their students. If they fail to take up this challenge, then the future is bleak indeed. For if they will not do it, who else will? (p 17)*



The urgency of this rhetoric is compounded by the fact that media teachers seem to be almost alone in this struggle. Discussing the 'techniques' used by television 'in order to engineer consent for dominant ideologies', Masterman declares:

*The extent to which they will continue to be effective will depend almost entirely upon the efforts of media teachers everywhere. (p 153)*

This 'vanguard' which 'leads', 'shapes' and 'urges' clearly has a weighty moral responsibility, very similar to that bestowed by Leavis and Thompson on English teachers. Indeed, Masterman's attempt to reclaim the radical 'minoritarianism' of the *Scrutiny* tradition, which is informed by the valuable work of Francis Mulhern<sup>8</sup>, represents a notable shift from his position in *Teaching about Television*. Interestingly, Masterman now defines the 'most debilitating inheritance of Leavisism', not as elitism, but as its 'curious . . . absence of an explicit politics' (p 46). The implication seems to be that if only Leavisism *had* possessed an 'explicit politics', it would have represented a truly progressive force.

Another of Masterman's notable recoveries from Leavis is the concept of the 'critical function'. The term 'critical' recurs throughout *Teaching the Media*, at times to an almost obsessive degree:

*The really important and difficult task of the media teacher is to develop in pupils enough self-confidence and critical maturity to be able to apply critical judgements to media texts **which they will encounter in the future**. The acid test of any media education programme is the extent to which pupils are critical in their own use and understanding of the media **when the teacher is not there**. The primary objective is not simply critical awareness and understanding, it is critical autonomy. (pp 24-25)*

Further down the same page, we are urged to enable students to stand 'on their own two critical feet', to develop 'critical consciousness' and 'critical abilities', to facilitate 'critical reading' and to work for 'critical transfer to new situations'. Expressed in these terms Masterman's argument is open to an infinite range of interpretations: for who would possibly argue that education is *not* concerned with developing 'critical faculties'?

A similar problem arises with Masterman's use of the term 'media literacy':

*Widespread media literacy is essential if all citizens are to wield power, make rational decisions, become effective change-agents and have an active involvement with the media. (p 13)*

Again, it is difficult to disagree. Yet what exactly is media literacy? Masterman's examples suggest a particularly reductive and passive definition of the term. To draw an analogy with verbal literacy, he is almost exclusively concerned with 'reading' rather than 'writing'. Practical work is discussed in highly negative terms in the space of little

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<sup>9</sup> See Patricia Marks Greenfield, *Mind and Media*, London, Fontana, 1984 and Jennings Bryant and Daniel R Anderson (eds), *Children's Understanding of Television*, Academic Press, 1983.

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more than a page, and is firmly subordinated to 'the crucial activity of critical analysis' (p 27). Yet this activity itself, the kind of 'reading' Masterman wishes to encourage, seems to refer to a very restricted aspect of what reading is normally seen to involve. For instance, he argues that

*... the basic media literacy technique of relating media messages to the political, social and economic interests of those who are producing them, needs to be encouraged as a matter of course by teachers of all subjects. (p 242)*

— an assertion which will surprise psychologists who have been using the term in a very different way for decades<sup>9</sup>.

The difficulty here is that ostensibly neutral terms are being used as rhetorical counters, as means of commanding assent. Appearing to encompass a broad range of positions, in practice they refer to an extremely narrow definition of Media Education. Just as 'literacy' is ultimately confined to 'reading', so 'critical reading' is confined to reading *against* the 'ideology' of media texts. If such terms are not themselves to cause further mystification, it is important to be clear about their meaning, and indeed to be explicit about one's politics.

Unfortunately, the politics of *Teaching the Media* are in many respects highly contradictory. While the most consistent strand might broadly be termed economic determinism, it is qualified at so many points that it is difficult to detect a coherent argument. Masterman's favoured technique is to offer a number of different positions on an issue, moving from one to the next as if they were straightforwardly complementary. His chapter on audience, which moves through David Morley, Dorothy Hobson and Dallas Smythe, is a case in point, as is his chapter on ideology, discussed below.

Masterman's most consistent emphasis is on the media as 'consciousness industries', whose primary function is to maintain capitalist production:

*The media's crucial role is a reproductive one. The media in producing particular kinds of audience consciousness reproduce the conditions which enable further economic production to take place. (p 22)*

In this argument 'the real' is conflated with 'the economic':

*One of the most important functions of media teaching is continually to bring economic questions to the surface during the analysis of media texts. This is necessary since real economic relations are subjected to so much mystification within capitalism, and hard economic facts are so rarely available for open inspection that there is always a danger of forgetting that many of the questions of the kind discussed in this book—questions of audience, of institutional self-regulation, of the importance of news sources, or of media genres and conventions, for example—are really, at heart, economic issues. (p 102, my emphases)*

An analysis of game shows, for example, using data about the cost of the programmes and advertising rates,

*allows pupils to see through the mystificatory pseudo-relationships set up by the show, and uncover the real economic relationships which exist between contestants, host and television company.* (p 104, my emphases)

Masterman's account of the media industries is particularly indebted at a number of points to the work of Dallas Smythe, which, as he suggests, is little known in this country. The central concept in Smythe's work is that of the 'audience commodity'<sup>10</sup>: the primary function of the media, he argues, is to sell audiences to advertisers, while the programmes or editorial content are merely a form of free lunch provided to encourage the audience slaves to work without pay for capital. Masterman points to the disabling pessimism of this monolithic conception of the media, yet it is precisely this conception (rather than the very much more complex work of David Morley and Dorothy Hobson) which informs his overall rationale.

Masterman's emphasis on uncovering real economic relationships marks a significant shift from his position in *Teaching about Television*, although it is couched in similar demystificatory terms. In particular, he is clearly troubled by the apparent contradiction between his insistence on a non-hierarchical pedagogy and this emphasis on understanding structural determinants. He attempts to evade the difficulty by arguing that

*... it is less important for students to grapple with large amounts of information than to grasp the inter-related nature of the complex web of influences at play within any media text and to be able to weigh a number of different factors in the balance in assessing texts.* (p 71)

Precisely how these factors can be grasped *without* large amounts of information is not fully clear, although Masterman does argue for a 'reference skills' approach: 'It is less important for students to remember information than to know where to find it, and to be able to use it' (p 76). Yet how will students be able to interpret the intricacies of BRAD or JICNARS or *Benn's Press Directory* without a grasp of basic economics—a subject still rarely taught in schools? This, it seems to me, is not the least of the difficulties. How are teachers to persuade their students that particular relationships are 'real' and others merely 'mystificatory'? And even if they do, will it necessarily make any difference to the way in which students read particular texts?

This is not to imply that the 'real' is merely an objectivist illusion, but rather to acknowledge that the process of *defining* the real is inevitably, in the teaching situation, one of struggle. The difficulty here arises from Masterman's basic *opposition* between the 'real' (the economic level) and the 'mystificatory' (the ideological level), an opposition which effectively negates the concrete, material existence of ideology itself. Identifying

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<sup>10</sup> The label 'determinist' is perhaps inappropriate as a description of Smythe's work, which effectively rejects the existence of a superstructure and collapses consciousness itself into the economic base. See Dallas Smythe, *Dependency Road*, Ablex, 1981. See also the debate in the *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*: Dallas Smythe, 'Communications: Blindspot of Western Marxism', vol 1 no 3, Fall 1977; Graham Murdock, 'Blindspots About Western Marxism: A Reply to Dallas Smythe', vol 2 no 2, Spring-Summer 1978.

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(rather than 'uncovering') relationships of production and exchange is without doubt a central concern of Media Education: yet to grant those relations a determining power, and to suggest that ideology can merely be swept away once its economic determination is revealed, is, at the very least, to over-simplify the process.

Ultimately, these problems derive from Masterman's constant recourse to a definition of ideology as false consciousness. Chapter six of *Teaching the Media* explicitly addresses the problem of defining ideology, taking in Marx, Althusser, Barthes, Gramsci, Hall and Poulantzas en route. Masterman's account of these theories does draw out some contradictions between them, but the overall impression is of a series of complementary approaches. As a result, his own definition is far from clear, although the terms 'ideas', 'values' and 'beliefs' recur as synonyms for 'ideology'. For example:

*Ideological analysis—in the sense of analysis which is designed to uncover those more or less coherent sets of values and beliefs which are thought to underpin a text—consists of piecing together the text's connotative fragments. (p 204)*

However, ideological analysis must go beyond the level of 'content', of determining 'the large and significant ideas' which are seen to underpin texts:

*Finally, it is of vital importance to ask whose interests are served by such ideas. Out of what material conditions and interests do they spring? And what are the material **consequences** of such ideas (i.e. how do they work to subvert or reinforce existing power relations within society?) (p 200)*

Masterman's answers to these questions are in fact largely pre-ordained in his overall conceptualisation of the subject field. The rejection of his earlier emphasis on the study of a single medium (as argued in *Teaching about Television*) in favour of the study of the media as a whole is based on an economic analysis of the integration of media industries with other service and consumer industries:

*It is this fact which makes it of some importance that the media should be considered as a whole (rather than in isolation from one another), gives some substance to the idea that the media serve important economic and ideological roles within the processes of capitalist production in general, and makes it unsurprising that, on the whole, the values and assumptions of media texts are not greatly at variance with those of the capitalist system. (p 85)*

The particular theory of ideology which informs these arguments, then, defines ideology as a primarily *cognitive* phenomenon, and as a function of the interests and intentions of its *producers*. Ideologies are ideas or beliefs which underpin particular texts and which can be recovered by peeling away the surface layers of 'mystification' which serve to obscure

them from view. Texts are thus defined as objects to be deciphered: meaning is something inherent in the text, although 'real' meanings may need to be differentiated from 'surface' meanings through a process of analysis. The ideological effectivity of a text can be defined in terms of the interests it serves, which are identical with the interests of those who produce it. By exposing and questioning these interests, teachers will enable their students to break with dominant ideologies. (p 35)

The crucial absence here is of any theory of *subjectivity*. By locating ideological production at the level of media industries, Masterman all but evades the issue of how readers of texts are themselves producers of ideology, as well as being produced by it. Ideology is seen as a matter of what the text 'says' rather than of how it works. As cognitive phenomena, these ideologies, or 'ideas' and 'beliefs', can simply be cast aside when their 'real' (i.e. economic) motivation is demonstrated.

In a certain sense, this approach may be seen to *underestimate* the power of ideology and its 'irrational' operation. If we are to understand the process whereby subordinate groups may come to identify with their oppressors and to accept their ways of perceiving the world, we require a more complex account of the relationship between ideology, language and subjectivity. Yet on the other hand, the notion of domination which informs Masterman's theory repeatedly lapses into a sense of power as consistent, monolithic, and all encompassing. Contradiction, insofar as it is acknowledged, finds its source in conflicts *within* the dominant power-bloc (for example, between the state and the media), rather than in the relationship between texts and audiences. Such a theory cannot acknowledge the fact that media texts may serve interests which run *counter* to those of their producers, and thus have quite contradictory material consequences.

Masterman's chapter on audience unfortunately does little to redress this balance. While commenting on the relative neglect of the audience within Media Education, and offering a brisk summary of the work of Morley, Hobson and Smythe, Masterman's account remains marginal and barely qualifies his overall project. It is quite simply inadequate to suggest, as Masterman does at a couple of points towards the end of the book, that 'media education has often been (and sometimes still continues to be) such a negative enterprise that a *celebratory* approach to the subject, one which emphasises its positive and pleasurable aspects, is long overdue' (p 238). Questions about pleasure should surely be the starting point of any account of Media Education, rather than what amounts to an afterthought. It is precisely Masterman's own definition of the subject as 'demystificatory and critical' (p 9) which has led such questions to be marginalised.

This exclusion is in turn symptomatic of a broader imbalance in Masterman's map of the subject field. His examples of media texts are almost exclusively—and, given his overall problematic, inevitably—drawn from news, current affairs and documentary. He constantly returns to the media coverage of the Falklands/Malvinas war, the miners' strike and Northern Ireland, or to programmes such as the

Panorama documentary *The Best Years?* on comprehensive education. What is largely excluded from *Teaching the Media*, however, is any sustained account of popular television, and in particular television fiction. Serials, situation comedy, children's television, TV drama, teenage comics, feature films—these are merely a few of the areas which are barely touched upon, despite the fact that they are far more popular with young people than news and documentary.

One does not have to be a wholesale progressivist to recognise the educational value of engaging with one's students' existing knowledge, or indeed to recognise the particular difficulty of starting with areas of the *teacher's* knowledge which are fairly remote from those of one's students. I have found that the major problem to be overcome in teaching about TV news in schools is simply that most students don't watch it and find it extraordinarily boring. This is not to suggest that one should avoid teaching about it—merely to argue that the problem should be acknowledged as such. A further difficulty arises in trying to convince students of the *partiality* of news: attempting to demonstrate what Masterman describes as Arthur Scargill's 'scrupulous logic and considerable wit', let alone the justice of the miners' cause, can degenerate into pointless confrontation. Again, this is not to suggest that it cannot or should not be done—merely to point to the problems of an approach which in many (although not all) situations, places the teacher as the bearer of 'alternative realities' which are inherently superior to the *experienced* 'realities' of one's unfortunate, deluded students.

Masterman argues that the 'deconstruction' of texts, 'breaking through their surface to reveal the rhetorical techniques through which meanings are produced' (p 127), can enable a 'critical liberation' from them. As I have argued, this is to theorise ideology in purely cognitive terms, in which false beliefs are seen simply as a result of inadequate information. In teaching TV news, one might indeed be able to demonstrate the inadequacy or partiality of coverage of the miners' strike, for example—depending, of course, on whether your students are disposed to believe you in preference to television. What will not necessarily change is their belief that miners are basically thugs and vandals, or indeed their commonsense inclination to regard the news as a means of finding out about the day's events. In order to at least investigate the latter, one would need to raise questions about the viewing process, about the orientations and expectations invoked and produced in audiences by the *institution* of news—in other words, one would need to understand the nature of news spectatorship and its paradoxical pleasures.<sup>11</sup> By regarding ideology as a property of the text itself rather than as a process of production, Masterman's empiricist approach excludes such considerations.

These problems are compounded when this news/documentary paradigm is applied to fictional forms. Any attempt to attribute a single ideological effectivity to *Dallas* or *Coronation Street* is inevitably doomed to failure, as successive writers have argued.<sup>12</sup> To analyse *Dallas* in terms of mediation, in terms of its adequacy to the real, would merely produce

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<sup>11</sup> cf Robert Stam, 'Television News and Its Spectator', in E. Ann Kaplan (ed), *Regarding Television*, Frederick, MD, American Film Institute, 1983. The forthcoming British Film Institute teaching pack *Teaching TV News* provides useful resources for exploring such issues.

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<sup>12</sup> For example, Ien Ang, *Watching Dallas*, London, Methuen, 1985; Dorothy Hobson, *Crossroads: The Drama of a Soap Opera*, London, Methuen, 1981; Terry Lovell, 'Ideology and Coronation Street', in Richard Dyer et al (eds), *Coronation Street*, Television Monograph no 13, London, British Film Institute, 1981.

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the insight that the Ewings don't behave like people in real life, but it would tell us very little about the complex pleasures audiences may derive from such programmes. Masterman concludes his brief discussion of pleasure by urging teachers to examine

*the structural connections between dominant beliefs and dominant modes of pleasure production.... We all, teachers and students alike, need to own up to the possibility that our media pleasures, which are **actively produced for us**, may be instrumental in engineering consent for forms of domination and oppression to which we are opposed.* (pp 239-40, my emphases)

This is to pose the issue in a very reductive manner, to say the least. The investigation of pleasure is seen in terms of identifying the 'beliefs' which it supports and as a matter of 'owning up' to something which is likely to be unsound, or at least embarrassing. Here again, the audience is denied an active role, and cast as the hapless victim of machinations completely beyond its control: in this formulation, pleasure is produced 'for us' rather than *by us*, and its operation is described through metaphors about structures and engineering. This is not to imply that pleasure is in some way sacred, or that it is a unitary phenomenon. Yet if Media Education is to address the politics of pleasure, it must surely examine pleasure on its own terms, and in ways which acknowledge the power of audiences as active producers of pleasure. As Richard Dyer<sup>13</sup> has recently argued, there is a distinct danger of teachers assuming they already know about these issues: we need to understand more about the meanings and pleasures children derive from the media, before we start to question how they are produced.

#### IV

Questions of subjectivity are clearly central to an understanding of pedagogy, and it is in this area that Masterman's account is at its most contradictory. On the one hand, as I have indicated, he places a strong central emphasis on an understanding of the 'real' economic determinants of media production, and on the possibility of a definitive interpretation of the 'ideology' of media texts. On the other hand, he espouses a 'non-hierarchical' pedagogy which will 'liberate rather than oppress or domesticate' (p 31), based on 'dialogue' and 'a genuine sharing of power' (p 33). The problem here resides not so much in Masterman's *theory* of pedagogy, as in the incompatibility between these highly rhetorical declarations and his definition of the subject field itself. In other words, it is difficult to see *how* one would be able to teach about the media as Masterman defines them in the way he deems necessary. Manuel Alvarado's critique of *Teaching about Television*<sup>14</sup> remains pertinent here, and in particular his argument about the inappropriateness of using 'progressivist' methods as a means of teaching 'information-laden' areas of the subject—areas which assume far greater prominence in

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<sup>13</sup> Richard Dyer, 'Taking Popular Television Seriously', in David Lusted and Phillip Drummond (eds), *TV and Schooling*, London, British Film Institute, 1985.

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<sup>14</sup> Manuel Alvarado, 'Television Studies and Pedagogy', *Screen Education* no 38, Spring 1981, pp 56-67.

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Masterman's more recent work. Yet at the same time, the implicit faith both Masterman and Alvarado place in the value of what might be termed 'radical information' as a means of changing students' attitudes deserves further questioning. Neither of these writers provides an adequate account of the complexity of the learning process, or fully acknowledges the *difficulty* of implementing their proposals in the classroom.

In my experience, these difficulties are particularly acute in the areas of anti-racist and anti-sexist teaching. Study of the media is often a central concern in such teaching, and, although Masterman's book scarcely engages with these issues, the demystification approach he argues for certainly represents the dominant rationale. Yet, it may well prove ineffective and, in certain circumstances, highly counter-productive.

Judith Williamson's article 'How Does Girl Number 20 Understand Ideology?'<sup>15</sup> draws attention to what is surely the key problem here – the nagging doubt that what we think we are teaching may not be what our students are learning. The danger in teaching about ideology, Williamson suggests, is that students may learn to produce what are seen as 'correct' responses without necessarily investigating or problematising their own position. Boys may quite easily learn their anti-sexist lines, but their condemnation of girls' romantic fiction, for example, may end up reinforcing their belief that girls enjoy such material simply because they are stupid. In my own teaching experience in secondary and higher education I have encountered similar difficulties in attempting to confront this problem.

Following Williamson's argument that boys *do* have experience of sexism, I have attempted to investigate the terms of this experience – which, as she suggests, is an experience precisely of *dominance*. The problem here, of course, is that in analysing 'images of men' one runs the risk of merely confirming this dominance, just as one's anti-racist intentions may simply disappear under the weight of negative 'images of blacks'<sup>16</sup>. It also seems far easier for boys and for myself as a male teacher to adopt a safe, ironic stance towards such images, quite different from the indignation which 'images of women' may provoke (and deserve). I don't know whether this is because men somehow have less invested in the way they are represented, or whether irony is simply a luxury of the powerful. In analysing images of dominance, one is looking for contradictions and exclusions, for the neuralgic points which undermine the assumption of natural authority. In certain cases, these are easy to identify: the fourteen-year-olds I taught didn't have significant problems in understanding the scene in *The Beguiled* when the women amputate Clint Eastwood's leg, for instance. Yet in other cases – and perhaps in the cases where it counts – the contradictions are far more difficult to broach. Attempting to identify the role of homoerotic desire in the display of the male body may be a challenging seminar topic for adults, but for fourteen-year-old boys whose own insecurities may typically be exorcised through jokes about

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<sup>15</sup> Judith Williamson, 'How Does Girl Number Twenty Understand Ideology', *Screen Education* no 40, Autumn/Winter 1981/2, pp 80-87.

<sup>16</sup> cf David Buckingham, 'The Whites of Their Eyes, A Case Study in Response to Educational Television' in Martin Straker-Welds (ed), *Education for a Multicultural Society*, Bell and Hyman, 1984.

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AIDS, it's clearly a rather more difficult issue. If their teacher happens to fancy John Travolta, that's his problem, but it's certainly nothing whatsoever to do with them.

A second strategy I have used more effectively is to investigate such issues through practical work. The value of practical work here is that it can allow students to interrogate their *own* position: they are obliged to define their own arguments and construct their own representations, which can then be analysed using approaches developed in relation to dominant media. In my experience, students often thus discover contradictions and incoherencies in their own positions which would never have emerged through analysis alone. School students attempting to construct 'anti-sexist' photo-love stories, for example, have become aware of the inadequacies of straightforward role-reversal, while others have found ways of using the form as a means of investigating precisely those issues of sexual identity which are so difficult to discuss in other contexts. Using dominant forms for different ends can provide a means of problematising 'commonsense' attitudes and received wisdom: students who have analysed sexism and racism in dominant media may well find themselves unthinkingly reproducing attitudes they have 'officially' disclaimed, and their subsequent criticisms of their own work can lead to more profound re-thinking.

The limitations of 'demystification' are not confined to teaching in schools, however. In addressing similar issues in higher education, I have been disturbed by the way in which students initially tend to define themselves against texts which are perceived as ideologically suspect. A group dynamic may develop in which the strength of one's criticism is taken as evidence of one's ideological soundness – what one might term a 'more right-on than thou' stance. Again, this is a game which students can easily learn and which they can use as a means of scoring political points. What it may prevent is any recognition of the complexity of our responses to texts, and, indeed, of the differences between them – in this game, dissenters are simply defined as hopeless liberals. This precisely avoids any examination of one's own position, not merely for white people and for men (who can avoid recognising their own racism and sexism by displacing it onto a text), but also for black people and women (who may be forced into an artificial solidarity which cannot acknowledge contradictions). What all too often results is a blanket rejection of popular forms, and the constant re-statement of a 'bottom line' in which, to paraphrase Terry Lovell<sup>17</sup>, the fact that the media are not feminist and revolutionary necessarily means they are agents of patriarchy and reaction. Such an approach leads to a situation in which Media Studies is inevitably, in Masterman's terms, a 'negative enterprise', relieved only by the search for the Holy Grail of the truly progressive text.

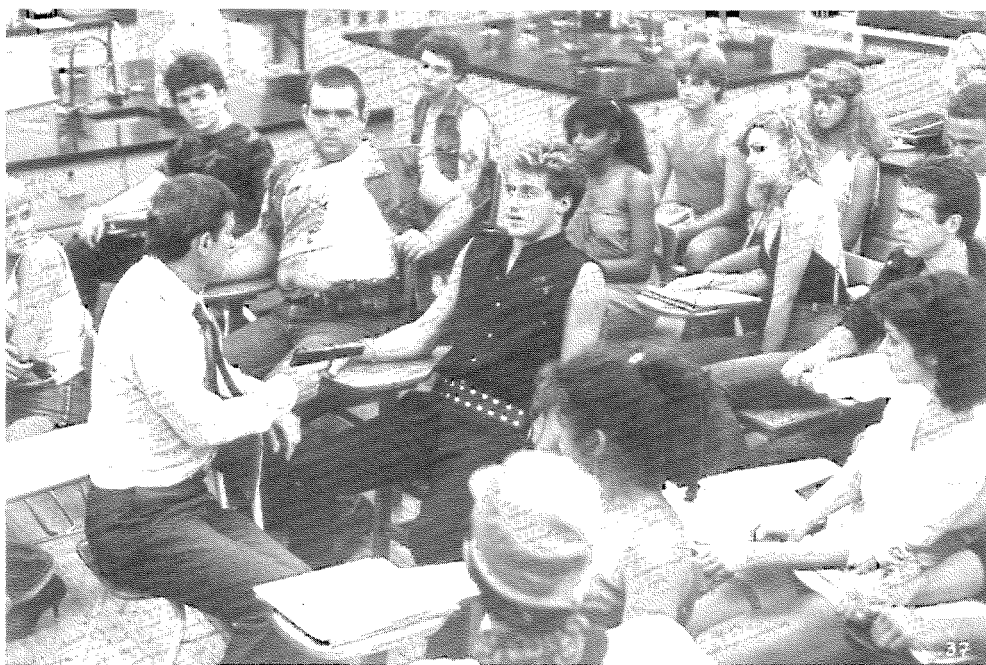
What is disturbing about this dynamic (and it is particularly a group dynamic) is that it can occur so frequently *despite* one's intentions as a teacher. To return to school, we might see the problem as being the curse of the 'lefty' teacher. Once students have recognised you as such,

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<sup>17</sup> Terry Lovell, 'Ideology and *Coronation Street*', in E Ann Kaplan (ed), *Regarding Television*, op cit.

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they may either choose to play the game (in which case Media Studies becomes the lesson in which they say lots of ideologically sound things) or refuse to do so (in which case they say things they may or may not believe, simply to annoy you and thereby amuse themselves). Neither strategy necessarily involves them in re-thinking, or indeed in even formulating, their own position. Both strategies, and the latter in particular, may also be strongly informed by the dimension of social class. In many cases, a middle-class teacher who attempts to impose ideological soundness on working-class students is likely to encounter resistance, not necessarily because the students have consciously articulated beliefs which are under attack, but simply because it represents yet another instance of middle-class people telling them what to think. In my experience, the National Front student who will argue (often calmly and 'logically') from a racist position is very much the exception. The majority of students who resist the official line do so because they do not wish to be identified with 'trendies', with the values of another social class. It is this class dimension which has produced a destructive counter-reaction in certain London schools, where black and white, male and female students have taken to racist and sexist abuse as a means of resisting the imposition of what are seen as middle-class standards.



Authoritarian pedagogy: still from *Class of 1984*.

This class dimension operates in a different way in higher education. My own experience in teacher training is that many students initially choose Media Studies because they see it as a means of saving the working class, of liberating it from its ideological chains. Yet it is precisely their own unacknowledged class attitudes which inform and reinforce their analysis of popular culture. Just as for Leavisites working-class taste in 'trash' implicitly confirmed lack of intelligence, so working-class pleasure in racist and sexist popular culture is implicitly seen as evidence of helpless subordination to 'false consciousness'. In both cases, the teacher is the moral guardian, who inoculates students against ideological disease.

What isn't open to critical questioning here is the *teacher's* position. It is on this point that Ian Connell's response to Judith Williamson hits home<sup>18</sup>: if 'critical questioning' is to be promoted, it must surely apply not merely to students but also to teachers, and the methods of analysis teachers introduce must be seen, not as neutral tools for the acquisition of knowledge, but as *themselves* ideological. Like Judith Williamson, Len Masterman already has the answers to his critical questions, and his methods of analysis are designed to reveal and to command assent to these answers. To represent such a view as 'everything... is in fact relative' (Williamson) or as merely neutral (Masterman's 'media literacy') is dishonest: to suggest that it is a process of equal dialogue, based on a 'genuine sharing of power', as Masterman argues (p 33), is just wishful thinking.

The kind of self-reflexive approach I am implicitly suggesting here is easy to propose in theory, but more difficult to achieve in practice. It is extremely hard to prevent 'analysis' becoming simply another exercise in guessing what's in teacher's mind, or to avoid guiding the process in such a way as to produce a consensus 'objective' reading. This is perhaps particularly the case with the three-stage approach Masterman derives from the early work of Barthes, where the different connotations of a text are seen to 'cluster' into a definitive ideological interpretation. One of the major educational implications of recent work on media audiences is to problematise this notion of a consensus reading, and to indicate the dangers of assuming that one can read for others. Nevertheless, a pedagogy which would be concerned to validate and to investigate the production of differential readings remains a distant prospect.

## V

Ultimately, the major weakness of *Teaching the Media*, and of most existing accounts of Media Education, is that they are preoccupied with defining *content* at the expense of an understanding of *process*<sup>19</sup> – not merely of the learning process, but also of the process of reading media texts. Yet, as I have argued, if we are to develop effective teaching strategies, we need to go beyond rhetorical assertions and build upon a thorough understanding of the complexities of both types of process. On a theoretical level, this will involve making connections between theories

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<sup>18</sup> Ian Connell, '“Progressive” Pedagogy?', *Screen* May-June 1983, vol 24 no 3, pp 50-54.

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<sup>19</sup> This criticism was first raised by David Lusted in his article 'What Would Constitute a Critical Pedagogy?', *Screen Education* no 25, Winter 1977/78.

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of learning and theories of reading, in the context of broader theories of ideology and subjectivity. Yet it is particularly crucial that these theoretical developments inform, and are informed by, detailed accounts of classroom practice. Judith Williamson's article represents a valuable starting point for such work, although, like my own observations in this piece, it remains primarily anecdotal, informed by theories of ideology but largely innocent of theories of learning.

Nevertheless, it would be wrong to suggest that we are starting from scratch. Masterman's work suffers from a disabling tendency to present Media Education as a wholly new development, which has completely transcended the inadequacies of its progenitors, and in particular those of Film Studies and English. The danger, it seems to me, is that Media Education has on the contrary been influenced and indeed severely limited by its reaction *against* these disciplines—in effect by the conditions of its birth. Masterman's position leads him to ignore many of the positive achievements of these areas. English is identified with the influence of a monolithic 'liberal-humanist tradition' and thereby swept aside (p 250). Film is defined as a medium remote from students' experience, and 'film culture' dismissed as 'elitist' (p xiv). In place of these caricatures, Masterman's favoured discipline is clearly sociology, although even here his arguments are informed by a very narrow range of perspectives and ignore many more recent developments in social and ideological theory<sup>20</sup>.

Masterman's rhetorical insistence that Media Education Is The Answer appears increasingly threadbare in the light of his repeated brushing aside of substantial areas of work from which it has much to learn. Recent work in English teaching, for instance, has been concerned to develop a materialist theory of language and learning which could directly inform the broader study of signification in Media Education. The work of Vygotsky, which underlies much classroom research of the past ten years, would seem to be particularly productive here<sup>21</sup>. The recent development of language study in English teaching<sup>22</sup> offers a further point of connection, although it is notable that English teachers have been concerned not to divorce language study from the broader context of language *use*—unlike the disabling division between 'theory' and 'practice' in Media Education.

While Masterman's argument for the centrality of television in Media Education is certainly persuasive, his rejection of film as an object of study seems to have been accompanied by a rejection of the methodologies developed within film studies over the last twenty years. *Teaching the Media*, like its predecessor, tends to rely on a model of semiotic analysis derived from the early work of Barthes (for example in its central chapter on Rhetoric), yet ignores considerable recent advances, not merely in semiotics but also, crucially, in theories of spectatorship and the reading process developed within film and literary theory. To turn from the breadth and sophistication of *Literary Theory* or *The Cinema Book*<sup>23</sup> to *Teaching the Media* is depressing, not least because the former provide a far more productive agenda for *teaching*

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<sup>20</sup> See John B Thompson, *Studies in the Theory of Ideology*, Polity Press, 1984, for a useful survey.

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<sup>21</sup> Lev Vygotsky, *Thought and Language*, Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1962, and *Mind and Society*, Harvard University Press, 1978.

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<sup>22</sup> For example, in the work of Peter Trudgill, Douglas Barnes and James Britton.

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<sup>23</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1983; Pam Cook (ed), *The Cinema Book*, London, British Film Institute, 1985.

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and *learning* than Masterman's reductive version of Media Education.

Finally it is important that the transition from Media Studies towards Media Education should be seen, not as an imperialist invasion, but as a process of making connections with progressive developments in other curriculum areas. In particular, it should be regarded as an opportunity for media teachers to develop a fuller understanding of the nature of learning and of children's experience of the media. The priority which has been given to primary education in recent debates is in this respect constructive, given primary school teachers' central emphasis on the learning process. It is surely time for media educators to abandon their crusading rhetoric, and acknowledge that we too have much to learn.

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# A REPLY TO DAVID BUCKINGHAM

BY LEN MASTERMAN

David Buckingham's piece reminds me a little of the deathless review of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* which appeared in *Field and Stream*.

... this fictional account of the day-by-day life of an English gamekeeper is still of considerable interest to outdoor-minded readers, as it contains many passages on pheasant raising, the apprehending of poachers, ways to control vermin, and other chores and duties of the professional gamekeeper. Unfortunately one is obliged to wade through many pages of extraneous material in order to discover and savour these sidelights on the management of a Midlands shooting estate, and in this reviewer's opinion this book cannot take the place of J.R. Miller's *Practical Gamekeeping*.

Buckingham, similarly, misreads the emphasis of *Teaching the Media*. He identifies the book's central theme as a debilitating *absence*, attributes to me views which I argue very specifically against, assigns to me values which I do not hold, and describe my approaches to working in the classroom in terms which are so abhorrent to me that I have spent much of the past 25 years in repudiating them. On this final point I note the irony of finding myself accused, within the pages of *Screen*, and by a staff member of the London University Institute of Education, of a narrow and rigidly authoritarian pedagogy. It certainly makes a change from having to defend myself from the charges made, from precisely the same quarters (see *Screen Education* numbers 38 and 40) of advocating dangerously child-centred and participatory methodologies.

This response, then, must necessarily be confined to the arguments which Buckingham attributes to me, and a clarification of the main themes of the book. I will deal with the issues

which he raises under five general headings: his interpretation of my views on ideology; his characterisation of the pedagogies I advocate as autocratic; his belief that 'my' version of media education fails to describe or theorise learning; his assertion that I repeatedly brush aside substantial areas of work; and his irritability at what he calls my 'crusading rhetoric'.

1. **Ideology:** Buckingham attributes to me a view of ideology which I spend much time in attacking in *Teaching the Media*. He has it that I equate ideology with 'false consciousness', that I argue that ideology is something inherent in texts (and, by implication, nothing more than this) and that 'the notion of domination which informs Masterman's theory repeatedly lapses into a sense of power as consistent, monolithic and all encompassing'. He doesn't provide a single example of these 'repeated lapses', but he does manage to omit any reference to a chapter, over fifty pages in length, in which I give a comprehensive treatment of the nature of textual determinants. Indeed my aim there is specifically to take issue with the kind of arguments which Buckingham attributes to me, and to provide a model which will enable students 'to grasp the inter-related nature of the complex web of influences at play within any media text'.

*Teaching the Media* pays specific attention to the influence (and limitations of the influence) of owners and controlling companies, media institutions and personnel, self-regulating bodies, the law, the state, advertisers, audiences and media sources, and discusses the tensions which exist within and between these sources of influence. Indeed this is one of the book's central themes:

*A belief in the idea that the dominant ideology is simply a unified set of ideas and beliefs, which a dominant class imposes upon subordinate classes from above, would lead to a view of the media as monolithic and largely unproblematic carriers of ruling-class values. This is a common enough view of the media on the left, but it is crudely undialectical and does not adequately explain the subtlety of and contradictions within and upon the media at any given time. (pp 190-1)*

I then go on to discuss an instance in which it might seem justifiable to analyse the media in terms of its serving a 'monolithic' class interest:

*During the Falklands campaign, it was tempting, and in some cases justifiable, to denounce the media for their timorousness in uncritically reproducing the government line, and for the ease with which the government was able to manage and control information through the media for its own purposes. Yet any full account of the relationships between the state and the media during the conflict (or at any time) would need to acknowledge:*

- a) the genuine tensions which exist between the media and the state*
- b) the divisions which exist within the state*
- c) the divisions which exist within the media*
- d) the fact that dominant ideologies frequently appear to speak to the interests of subordinate groups. (p 191)*

But what of the claim that I fail to explore contradictions in the relationship between texts and audiences? In a chapter devoted to just such an exploration, I attempt to give a resumé of current research in the field of audience-text relations (some of it not easily accessible to teachers) and examine the radical break which this work makes with traditional approaches to textual study in the classroom. This chapter explores in some detail—through the analysis of the position offered to audiences in such programmes as *Family Fortunes*, *Any Questions?*, *The Boys from the Blackstuff* and *Disney Time*—how media texts attempt to construct our own subjectivity through the physical, social and ideological spaces which they encourage us to occupy. It also examines the radical implication of recent work on audiences for classroom methodology and practice:

*The important insight that audiences perform their own ideological operations upon texts needs to be*

*integrated into media teaching at all levels, viz:*

- a) Teachers will need to develop a sensitive and close working knowledge of the cultural competencies and sub-cultural differences which exist within their groups, so that they can predict with some accuracy the range of responses which a particular text is likely to elicit.*
- b) This understanding should not simply underwrite and inform the practice of teachers. It should also inform student responses, and give to students a greater awareness of the social and sub-cultural roots of their own judgements.*
- c) What is at stake here is rather more than personal understanding by students of the socially constructed nature of their own seemingly 'natural' responses, however. This understanding needs to be transferred to the responses of audiences to media texts generally. Teachers and students alike will need to widen their examination of media texts to include an analysis of the sense which is made of them by their audiences. (p 220)*

As a dichotomous thinker (continually posing the ideological analysis of texts against a consideration of production or audiences issues) Buckingham misses the dialectical approach to ideology upon which *Teaching the Media* is based:

*... the separating out of the four elements of the model which I have proposed (i.e. determinants, rhetoric, ideology, and audiences) whilst convenient for the purposes of further analysis and discussion, is seriously misleading unless each 'area' is understood as influencing, permeating and interacting dialectically with every other in a way that makes it difficult, finally, to conceptualise them as 'separate' areas at all. So questions of audience cannot be limited to what is postulated as a final point on a supposedly linear process of communication. Audiences are present as important textual determinants from the very beginning, and influence every part of the production and communication cycles. Similarly, questions of ideology cannot be confined to the analysis of the content of media texts. Owners, media professionals, advertisers, audiences and even media forms and conventions, all perform their own ideological operations upon and within texts, and questions of ideology permeate every area of the conceptual model which I have proposed. (pp 22-23)*

This is the context within which any textual analysis is placed in *Teaching the Media*. Again I make the point explicitly:

98 The 'ideological' is frequently conceptualised within media education as a **level of analysis** of a text. I shall be examining some possible ways into ideological textual analysis below, but here it is important to stress that ideologies permeate **every** aspect of media production, distribution, exchange and consumption. (p 199)

Now I do not wish to attribute to Buckingham views which he does not hold, but there is nothing in his review which supports the idea that media texts themselves have any ideological effectivity. I believe that they do, and I try to demonstrate in the book how the (for me) important objective of encouraging children and young adults to become autonomously critical readers of media texts might be achieved. The ideological analysis of texts is never simply a question of assessing or claiming 'correct' readings, however. Along that road lies not autonomy, but dependency. The process is, rather, inevitably tentative and exploratory, emerging out of a dialogue in which due weight is given to legitimate differential decodings by the group. However, sensitivity to the liberating possibilities of differential decoding should not blind us to the fact that (in David Morley's words) 'all meanings to not exist "equally" in the message: it has been structured in dominance although its meaning can never be totally fixed or "closed"'.

With these important provisos then, I do believe it important that teachers and students should engage in the ideological reading of media texts. Even within this limited sphere, however, Buckingham is incorrect to attribute to me a definition of ideology as 'false consciousness'. Ideology does not involve the imposition of false beliefs, but the *masking* and *displacement* of what Marx and Engels called 'real material conditions and relationships'. I argue (following Poulantzas) that bourgeois ideology involves the systematic masking of real economic relations and class exploitation, and that this process of masking is everywhere evident within the media. Does Buckingham deny this? This masking is accompanied by an equally systematic displacement of emphasis from the sphere of production to the sphere of exchange and consumption. The media

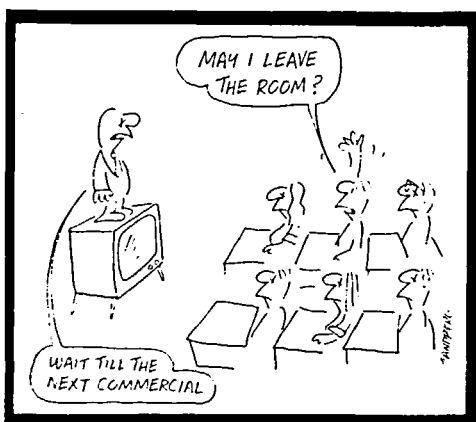
... construct a representation of monopoly capitalism which foregrounds the abundant variety

of products (brands) available for the gratification of supposedly autonomous individuals, while entirely concealing from view the processes by which these products are produced, the undemocratic nature of decisions about what gets produced and how, and the increasing uniformity masked by the multiplication of brand names. (p 214)

What *Teaching the Media* attempts is to take as comprehensive a view of ideology as possible, covering the production and reception of texts as well as the 'naturalising' effects of much media rhetoric.

2. **Pedagogy:** From Buckingham's serious misrepresentation of my position on ideology virtually everything else in his review flows. For example, he argues that I already have the answers to my own critical questions and that my methods 'are designed to reveal and to command assent to these answers'. Although he acknowledges *Teaching the Media's* emphasis on developing the pupil's critical autonomy, he writes off these statements as 'rhetorical declarations'. Given my view of ideology they must simply be wishful thinking or unresolved contradictions.

The problem with this view is that it ignores the very practical orientation of most of my work. *Teaching about Television*, for example, is primarily a classroom guide. And if, as Buckingham has been kind enough to suggest, the book has had any influence, it has almost certainly been upon teachers' classroom practices and methodologies. *Teaching the Media* further elaborates this methodology, but apart from offering ways of liberating the student from the 'expertise' of the teacher it also attempts to lessen



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teacher dependency on this or that set of teaching materials or exercises by clarifying the principles and processes upon which media education might be based.

**3. The failure to describe or theorise learning:** Buckingham believes 'the major weakness' of *Teaching the Media* to be a preoccupation 'with defining *content* at the expense of an understanding of *process*'. In fact I have argued for many years against content-based approaches to media education. In *Teaching the Media* I locate some of the early problems of media teaching in the attempt by many teachers 'to cover as many different content areas as possible' (p 18), and I map out in the book a theoretical framework, a conceptual map and a distinct mode of enquiry for the field. I argue later that 'the most satisfactory media education syllabuses will not be essentialist in terms of their content. Students may be freed, that is, of the oppressive load of content which *must* be covered. Syllabuses should seek, rather, to define the processes and principles which will enable students to stand as quickly as possible on their own two feet. Course content, teaching methodology and questions of evaluation will need to be thought through in the light of this priority. Content, in particular, needs to be thought of, not as an end in itself but as a means to developing critical autonomy and not submerging it' (p 25).

Now Buckingham, like anyone else, is very welcome to take issue with the philosophy of teaching and learning described in some detail in both *Teaching about Television* and *Teaching the Media*, or with the conceptual orientation of either book. But he denies that they exist. He compounds this with a curiosity: Eagleton's *Literary Theory* and the British Film Institute's *Cinema Book*, he argues, 'provide far more productive agendas for *teaching and learning*' (original emphasis) 'than *Teaching the Media*'. Now let me say from the outset that I am flattered to find my own work the subject of a comparison with the work of Britain's most interesting literary critic, and a bumper book on the cinema produced by ten different writers. Let me say, too, that both of these excellent books will undoubtedly be of great value in making accessible to teachers a large range of complex ideas and arguments from the fields of literary theory and film studies. Nevertheless,

Buckingham's claims for the books would surely astonish their authors. For *Literary Theory* does not make any explicit reference to questions of teaching and learning. And insofar as *The Cinema Book* makes any assumptions about these matters, it seems to be orientated towards a *content-based* view of its subject. To say that these books *provide* (not 'suggest' or 'stimulate us to consider') a productive agenda for teaching and learning is absurd.

**4. Narrow perspectives:** Buckingham repeatedly accuses me of a kind of intellectual tunnel vision. *Teaching the Media*, he argues, is guilty of 'a repeated brushing aside of substantial areas of work', ignores many 'positive achievements in Film Studies and English', does not make 'connections with progressive developments in other curriculum areas', and indulges in 'highly inaccurate caricatures' of other subject areas. There are a number of ways in which I can counter what are in themselves highly inaccurate, albeit entertaining, caricatures. For example, in *Teaching the Media* my 'sweeping aside' of English covers a discussion of the ideological history of the subject from Arnold, through the Newbolt Report, to a consideration of the work of Leavis, Thompson, and the *Scrutiny* movement. It covers the National Union of Teachers' 1961 conference on Popular Culture and Personal Responsibility, Hall and Whannel's *The Popular Arts*, books by Brian Firth and Nicholas Tucker, as well as the kind of issues raised by the *Literature, Teaching, Politics* movement and the most recent work of Catherine Belsey and Terry Eagleton.

What of my failure to make connections with progressive elements in other curriculum areas? *Teaching the Media* actually contains detailed accounts of cross-curricular developments in such subjects as geography, history and science, as well as a consideration of the ways in which media teachers can make progressive links with colleagues, parents and media professionals. A further seventy-odd pages of notes, references, and bibliographical and resource material appear at its end. Buckingham, indeed, entirely misreads the intention of the book, which is designed not so much to present 'my' theory of media education than as an homage to a growing international movement.

**5. Rhetoric:** Buckingham affects a metropolitan weariness at what he calls my

'crusading rhetoric'. For my part I think this is a poor response to the challenges which face the Media Education movement in the near future. The last few years have seen great steps forward, achieved, let it be remembered, in a general climate of low professional morale and dwindling resources. This hasn't been accomplished by the kind of negativity exemplified in Buckingham's review but by the dedication and enthusiasm of (often 'part-time') media teachers, who do share, yes, a sense of urgency about their work, and the significance of their undertaking. For my own part, the painful memory of popular media-led responses to the Falklands war is still fresh enough in my memory to make me believe that rather more is involved in the development of Media Education programmes than an updating

of the curriculum. And, as I argue in *Teaching the Media*, given the increasing sophistication of information and news management techniques and marketing strategies, as well as the general proliferation of PR, media education represents one of the best hopes we have of challenging the growing inequalities of knowledge and power which exist between those who control media and information systems and those who consume media innocently as news or entertainment. Buckingham's ironical distancing of himself from what he calls this 'weighty moral responsibility' is a luxury which few teachers can afford. The media education movement deserves more than the liberal-humanist aloofness from the challenges of current educational politics which he displays here.

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